

ISSUE 66 2005

cineACTION

QUESTIONS OF VALUE

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CineAction is published three times a year by the *CineAction* collective.

SINGLE COPIES

\$8CDN \$7US

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

1 year subscription
Individual, 3 issues \$21
Institutions, 3 issues \$40
2 year subscription
Individual, 6 issues \$36
Institutions, 6 issues \$70
For postage outside Canada
US pay in US funds
Overseas add \$15 for 1 year,
\$25 for 2 year subscription

MAILING ADDRESS:

40 Alexander St., # 705
Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M4Y 1B5
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We would like to thank the Canada Council for their generous support.

CineAction is owned and operated by *CineAction*, a collective for the advancement of film studies. *CineAction* is a non-profit organization.

ISSN 0826-9866

Printed and bound in Canada.

STILLS: Thanks to the Film Reference Library, Toronto; Toronto International Film Festival; Richard Lippe.

FRONT COVER: *Metropolis*

BACK COVER: *Rollover, Metropolis*



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QUESTIONS OF VALUE

As our subscribers and regular readers must have gathered, the five editors of *CineAction* work as a collective, but independent issues are not edited collectively, one editor (occasionally two) being responsible for each. We never interfere with each other's issues, each of which is

marked with the individual stamp of its particular editor and his/her specific interests and concerns. This editorial, then, does not necessarily reflect the views of the collective, though I shall be surprised if any of my colleagues object to it.

In announcing this issue as 'Questions of Value' I intended a challenge to what has been for the past few decades the dominant modes and concerns of academic film study, specifically its overwhelming emphasis on theory. I believe that our primary concern should be with the specific work, its meaning, the kind and degree of its achievement, its place within the history of our culture, in short its value. If theory can help us towards this end, well and good, but it should accept its role as relatively humble and supportive. One consequence of its dominance has been in my view disastrous: it has been responsible for finally destroying the always precarious continuity between academia and a more general readership, a wider public with a serious interest in the arts and specifically in film. In effect it has left criticism to the weekly reviewers.

My title was intended of course to evoke the work and spirit of F.R. Leavis, that great and still impressive figure who every year seems to become more problematic, to demand more reservations (today it is virtually impossible to find any of his works in the bookstores). And in many respects Leavis now belongs to the past (in my opinion to the present's great loss): his position depended upon the existence of a university as 'the creative centre of culture', a university that no longer exists, at least in North America, and there seems no present hope of its restoration. The contemporary, so called, university, with its 'Business' schools, its emphasis on technology, its apparently systematic marginalization of Arts programmes, its capitulation (without even a struggle) to the worst and currently most powerful developments of western culture, has become essentially yet another aspect of 'the enemy', though we have to continue to work in it as best we can.

The basis of Leavis's position was that the function of the Arts was to confront us with the great questions of existence: What do people live for? What *should* they live for? What *might* they live for?—questions for which there can be no final, simple, clearcut answer, any more than you can 'prove' the correctness of a value judgement. Today, and urgently, the position has become more complicated, to include politics as well as metaphysics, as no less than the future of life on our planet is at stake. Somehow, today, it seems to me that any book, magazine or university course devoted to the arts has a twofold duty: the preservation of continuity with all that is finest in our human, cultural past, together with a commitment to the overthrow of corporate capitalism, 'by all means necessary'. The essays in the present issue respond to the former of these obligations, and I hope (taking as inspiration Joel Bakan's brilliant book *The Corporation*, together with the TV/film version) to dedicate the next issue I edit to 'Film, Protest and Revolution'. As today's university has, overall, committed itself to corporate capitalism (how else can it get funding?), we cannot expect much help from it, nor can we expect (for the same reason) any effective support from our present western governments.

The response to this issue has been extremely encouraging: more submissions (I believe) than we have ever received before, most of them of remarkably high quality. Choice (considering that our very limited budget does not allow for an increase in space) has been painful and difficult. I was forced to take into account factors other than quality (where choice would have become impossible), one of which was my commitment to covering a very wide range of cinema past and present. For example, I received five articles on Hitchcock and (not wanting this to develop into another Hitchcock issue) felt forced to reject four of them. Some of the unused articles will appear in future issues.

Robin Wood

CALL FOR PAPERS

ISSUE 67 REFLEXIVE CINEMA

This issue will address films that make reference to the medium itself or to cinematic traditions from which they draw. Although many filmmakers in the past have foregrounded their links to cinema, recently this practice has resurfaced in both documentary form (Jacques Richard's *Le fantôme d'Henri Langlois*, Kiarostami's *10 on Ten*) and in fiction film (Tsai Ming-liang's *What Time Is It There?* and *Goodbye Dragon Inn*, Scorsese's *The Aviator*, Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Café Lumière*). We welcome articles on films from any era that evidence their relationship to the film medium.

Edited by Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe

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Please email the editor a brief proposal and declaration of interest.

Submissions in the form of a hard copy mailed to the editor by
JUNE 1, 2005.

ISSUE 68 NATURAL BORN KILLERS

The theme for this issue is *Natural Born Killers*. The issue's scope is broad, and intended to cover not just the obvious, in homage to Oliver Stone's film, a focus on the American obsession with violence and death as evidenced by American cinema both mainstream and independent, past and present; but also possible explorations of the impact of the democratization of imagemaking, where the proliferation and popularization of digital cameras, both still and video, have enabled everyone to both frame and expose their own manufactured horrors, from the US soldiers at Abu Ghraib to Iraqi terrorist executions, both available on the internet for downloading in the privacy of your own home. In extension, *Natural Born Killers* also refers beyond America's borders, as other national cinemas (Korea and Japan, to name two), have also produced an inordinate number of films about death and horror.

Edited by Susan Morrison smorr@the-wire.com

Please email the editor a brief proposal and declaration of interest.

Submissions in the form of a hard copy mailed to the editor by **SEPT. 1, 2005.**

A.I. or,

BY WILLIAM BEARD

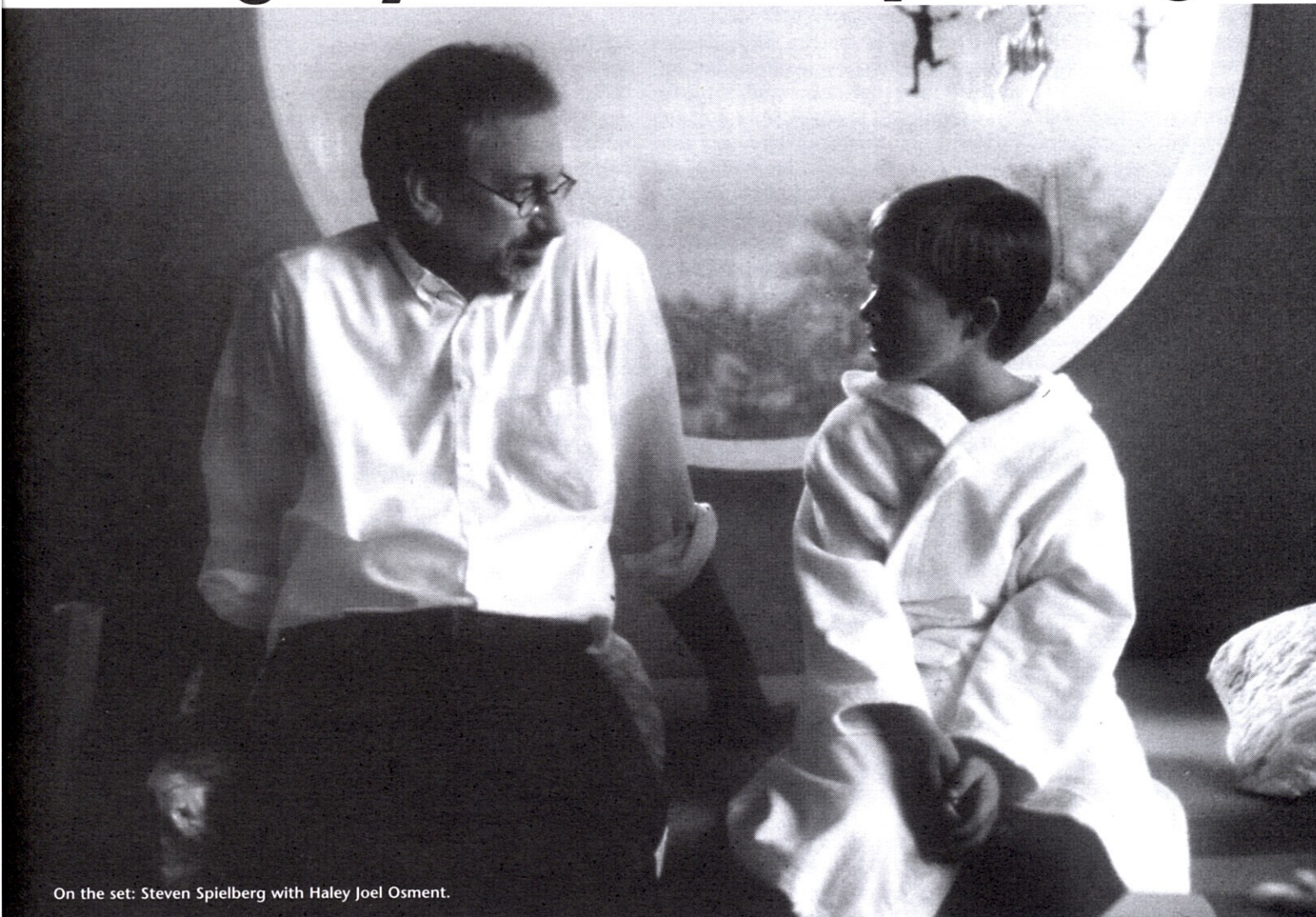
The modes of Spielberg

As everyone knows, Steven Spielberg's filmmaking career has different modes. Tim Kreider, writing at length about *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001) in *Film Quarterly*, says there are two of them: "movies for children" and "movies for grownups."¹ In the former category Kreider puts not just *E.T.* and the Indiana Jones and *Jurassic Park* movies, but also *Jaws* and *Close Encounters*; and in the latter category, of course, he puts *The Color Purple*, *Schindler's List*, *Amistad* and *Saving Private Ryan*. Kreider goes on to call Spielberg's "children's movies" "arguably the greatest made since Walt Disney's," and says more or less correctly that "since Spielberg and Lucas revolutionized filmmaking in the 1970s..., every Hollywood movie has been a children's film." By contrast, he has a lower opinion of Spielberg's "grownup" movies, which he accuses of having "the same ingratiating, manipulative techniques that make his children's films so effective" (32). So far, so familiar: Kreider's analysis more or less duplicates what many writers have said about Spielberg's films.

In this context, *A.I.* has given reviewers and commentators something to think about. This is because some aspects of the film are so emphatically in Spielberg's "children's" mode as to make it seem the whole film will be so, while others are disconcertingly dark and pessimistic, and consequently "grown up," but not in the overtly serious and socially conscious way that *The Color Purple* or *Schindler's List* are. The disturbing qualities of *A.I.* have widely been traced to its origins in a project that Stanley Kubrick had under development for almost 20 years, and more or less willed to Spielberg to complete upon his death in 1999. The Kubrick connection, and the degree to which *A.I.* in its present form retains strong elements of Kubrick's development, is a fascinating topic, but it is not one I am going to spend much time on here. Instead I want to discuss *A.I.* as a Spielberg film, more particularly as a Spielberg "children's film," and most particularly as the culmination of an undercurrent of despair running through many of those films.

Movies like *Close Encounters*, *E.T.*, and *Hook* occupy a position that is a continuation of a Hollywood phenomenon first seen decades earlier, during the late 1930s and 40s, most pointedly in the films of Frank Capra and in Disney's animated features. It is a syndrome that features a fervent idealism, a craving for a pure and perfect form of living, and it is accompanied by a corresponding anxiety, rising at times to hysteria, at the fear that the vision of a perfect world is not realizable, or is not strong enough to overcome the forces of darkness which range from laziness and cynicism to predatory greed and violence. Of course the phenomenon is a broad

The Agony of Steven Spielberg



On the set: Steven Spielberg with Haley Joel Osment.

one, and needs to be seen properly as an aspect of mainstream American culture. But there is a very particular expression of it in Capra and Disney, and it is this specific variety that is resurrected in Spielberg. One thing that distinguishes the Capra/Disney/Spielberg sub-group is what we might call a battle of faith. The realization, or failure, of the idealist enterprise is founded in an internal, spiritual landscape—it is a battle between *belief* and its enemy *doubt*. Obviously there is a religious overtone to such a scenario, and it is related, too, to that program of simplification and intensification that can be encompassed by Kreider's term "children's films." But it is especially noteworthy that even when (as in Capra) the project is a social and national one, and calls for the radical recasting of political and commercial institutions, it is always grounded in the socially-virtual realm of spiritual faith. Change the way you feel and you will change the world.²

Avoiding all the bean-counting and negotiation and compro-

mise, instead jumping directly to a massive, transfiguring solution to all problems—that is the Capra/Disney/Spielberg way. The leap of faith required by all aspects of such a solution requires a tremendous reserve of energy. That energy is comprised of the ardent wish for a transfigured life, which in turn is fueled by the horrible disappointment of *untransfigured* life. It is this negative motivation that is of particular interest to me in this cultural stream. It accounts for the "dark side" of Capra, of Disney—and of Spielberg. Henry Sheehan remarks that "although Spielberg's films are usually described as warm or even exhilarating and euphoric, their most prevalent temper is anxiety" arising from failures of masculinity,³ while Joseph McBride, outlining the "Peter Pan Syndrome" that it is often claimed Spielberg manifests as an artist, says it is characterized by free-floating anxiety based in parental unhappiness.⁴ In its purest form, though (and this is the form it takes indirectly in *Hook* and directly in *A.I.*), Spielberg's anxiety arises simply from

doubt, from a leaching-away of belief in transfiguration, finally of belief in belief. Whenever this happens to a filmmaker for whom faith is a foundation stone, the effects are very disturbing.

Capra

In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), more clearly still in *Meet John Doe* (1941) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Capra presents an America whose idealist aspirations are gravely threatened by forces of cynicism and corruption. "Aspirations" might not be the right word here. For Capra's brand of American exceptionalism, the USA is a nation founded in principles of equality and freedom, whose very existence is most essentially rooted not in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights, but in the faith of pure hearts. Mr. Smith's youthful small-town belief in American heroes and American institutions is mocked by all the Washington veterans for its gullible naïveté, but the childish faith of this foolish rube is, the movie preaches, exactly the quality that must be nourished and cherished if America is to be the godly utopia that it has to be. What must we (the American ideal viewers of these films) do to bring about the heaven-on-earth of universal happiness and blessedness that is within America's—and only America's—grasp? We must *believe* in it, we must believe it unquestioningly, with childlike innocence and purity of heart, as in God, as in Santa Claus. A child's faith, and a child's heaven as reward—that is the program of Capra's America.

But Capra is talking to himself as much as he is to his audience, it is himself he has to convince first. Capra has an *adult* perception that he has to defeat or suppress to reach the goal: his consciousness of the real world's selfishness and materialist corruption and of the real-world fate that awaits those who act with innocent faith in idealist principles. Almost all Hollywood movies navigate through threats and potential disasters to a happy ending, but in most of them the obstacles are only plastic traffic cones, and no damaging collision is ever possible. But in Capra the project of the film could suffer real harm if it hit one of these things, because for Capra not just the payoff but the conflict and the perils are extraordinarily vivid and substantial. There is a lot at stake here. You can not only win everything, you could also lose everything, and that gives rise to an equally extraordinary level of anxiety and even fear. This underlying anxiety is scarcely perceptible in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. But in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* the possibility of failure grows substantially, and Smith's terrible reverses start to resemble an Agony in the Garden and a Crucifixion that practically require a death before any Resurrection and Redemption are possible. The darkest moments of Christian suffering are even more vividly suggested in the amazing *Meet John Doe*, where the redemptive hero starts off as a complete fake and finally has to solemnly prepare to throw himself off a high building on Christmas Eve as a confession of the failure of his mission (in one of the endings Capra filmed, he actually jumps). Here, the struggle—the movie's, and Capra's—is a nightmarish one. The gulf of perdition is gazed into with anguished clarity and the awful danger gives rise to a wish-fulfilment deliverance of compensatingly extreme hysteria, so that finally the realm of celestial miracles has to be brought into play to balance the fear. This is a pattern seen even more clearly, if not quite so pathologically, in *It's a Wonderful Life*, where the movie's basic set is that the best man in the world—gifted but modest, bravely devoted to the good of others—will be driven to suicide by actually living according to this creed, and has to be saved by the intervention of an angel named Clarence and a science-fiction trip into an alternate universe where he never existed. *It's a Wonderful Life* is the Hollywood feel-good movie of all time, and it is instructive to think that it has probably achieved

this status not in spite of, but because of, its hysterically willed miraculous transformation of pure hell into blissful happiness. Apparently this functions as a lesson for everybody in the audience for whom things look dark: just figuring problems out and addressing them systematically obviously isn't going to work—what you have to do is hope for a miracle.

Disney

Disney's early animated features (and many of the later ones, too) traverse the same territory, though naturally from a different angle. The saccharine raptures of Disney's happy endings, and of his sentimental conceptions of childhood and parenthood, are a cliché; and to a certain extent so are the terrifying prospects of separation, torment and death that run through films like *Snow White* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942). The hysterical distance between these opposite poles is one element of similarity with Capra. It almost seems that in all these works, the more the narrative vision of happiness and fulfilment and perfect meaning is pushed to extremes, the more one finds the opposite vision—the vision that must be obliterated—of suffering and failure and emptiness being pushed to equal extremes. In Disney there is no social or national dimension to the narrative as there is, very explicitly, in Capra. Instead there is a dimension of primal family relations, child and parent, which, taking the child's point of view, articulates an intense desire for perfect womb-like love and safety and a fear of catastrophic rejection and loss. If in Capra the idealized protagonist is childlike in his purity of vision, in Disney he actually *is* a child; and in both cases the adult viewer is subject to the same rhetorical exhortation to "be as a child." The sentimentality of a Disney film (or a Spielberg film) is only possible because it comes from an adult mind trying to capture what it imagines is a child's perspective, or its own distorted memories of childhood feelings. Narratives actually formed by children never have this quality. In the context of this perspective of quasi-child-like hopes and fears, Disney brings to the field a particular quality of banal and yet overpowering *yearning*, a yearning for completeness and safety that is so basic and simple that it almost seems sacred. This sense of sacredness connects Disney again with the sacred American hopes and ideals of Capra's films. In any event, the double-sided dramatic wallop of primal yearning and primal fear is as good a way as any to sum up the emotional essence of Disney.

Close Encounters

The foundational film of the Spielberg this essay is focussed on is *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). Where earlier adventure films like *Jaws* (1975), and later ones like the Lucas-inspired Indiana Jones films, are "pure entertainments," diversions in an almost technical sense, *Close Encounters* brings to Spielberg's cinema that quality of yearning that I have been discussing in relation to Disney and Capra. The sense of the existence of something higher, more profound, than mere entertainment or diversion is at the core of this film, and it endows *Close Encounters* with a gravity and substance that for the first time identifies Spielberg's messianic ambitions as a filmmaker. The problem in *Close Encounters* is the insufficiency of adult life in America.⁵ The hero, Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss), lives in a regular house with a regular wife and two regular kids, and works at a regular blue collar job. It's not enough. True values, and in *Close Encounters* these are now specifically identified with *childhood* values, have gone missing. Roy yearns for a child's freedom and sense of adventure, while his wife is worried about grown-up questions like the mortgage and what the neighbours think, and his actual children have been debased

by soulless kid culture, and would rather go play Goofy Golf than, as Roy suggests, see Disney's *Pinocchio* (held out by Spielberg as an example of good kid culture that has true, deep childhood values). Then the heavenly aliens arrive, and start broadcasting telepathic promptings to properly receptive humans, a select group whose local members include Roy (but not his family), a little boy (but not his mother), and a scattering of UFO crazies.

What the aliens offer is salvation: something that will take people away from their petty stupid ordinary lives and give them something awe-inspiring and unimaginably blissful. Their spacecraft look like cavorting chandeliers—"toys!" as the little boy spontaneously cries—and a sign of their presence is that his actual toys suddenly become animated by a beneficent power that transcends Duracell. In the end an ecstatic Roy is chosen to accompany the aliens as they leave Earth. Neither he nor anyone else knows where he is going, but the important thing is that it isn't here. Roy has had his unsatisfying quotidian life replaced by a realm of the magical and special. It is important for my argument that the magical and the special become identified, in this film and in later Spielberg ones, with *movies*, especially with a certain kind of movie most powerfully symbolized for Spielberg by Disney cartoon features. This is the Kingdom of God held out by *Close Encounters*, a place where the words "suffer the little children to come unto me" are uttered not by Jesus Christ but by Walt Disney, and where John Williams's epic celestial music for the conclusion resolves into "When You Wish Upon a Star" from *Pinocchio*.⁶ Spielberg's creed can thus be reduced to the following statement: the redemption of ordinary life, of unsatisfying grownup life, through a return to childhood innocence and openness lies in movies—Disney movies, and now Spielberg movies. And in watching *Close Encounters*, you, the viewer, are redeemed from your own trivial life not by the idea of infinitely good alien life-forms, but by the uplifting experience of watching *Close Encounters*.

E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial

Passing briefly over *E.T.* (1982), we may note that once again it is the arrival of some magical external event (here the extra-terrestrial himself) that saves the child-protagonist from real-world troubles (here the pain of a broken home), and that once again epic feelings are manufactured by Spielberg out of potentially banal materials (a boy and his pet). The Disney connection can even be maintained through looking at *E.T.* as a remake of *Old Yeller* in which the dog doesn't die, even though huge mileage is gotten out of the possibility that he will (recalling in turn that Disney can be ruthless in a way that Spielberg finds it hard to do). We can also look forward a bit to *A.I.*, or at least the title of the Brian Aldiss story it is based on ("Supertoys Last All Summer Long"), by noting that *E.T.* himself is in effect a supertoy, a kind of super-Teddy. It is significant that *E.T.* begins with the arrival of magic in answer to ordinary emotional pain and ends with the departure of the magic, and the implied necessity for the child, and the viewer, to exit this world of childhood magic and to grow up. So that although bliss—endlessly protracted, floating, movie bliss taxing composer John Williams to the utmost—suffuses the ending of *E.T.* as it had the ending of *Close Encounters*, it is accompanied by the prospect of loss.

Hook

Hook (1991) is possibly Spielberg's worst movie, but it is square in the middle of the phenomenon I am trying to describe. As a number of commentators have pointed out,⁷ the film has a clear element of autobiography. The adult Peter Banning, rushing around making multi-million-dollar deals on a cell phone surrounded by

crowds of assistants, the adult who has become materialist and earthbound, is Steven Spielberg the successful maker of Hollywood blockbusters. And when this soulless obsessive needs to be taught to be a child again, to fly again, it is Spielberg exhorting himself to leave arid "adulthood" and reclaim the imaginative power of the magical child. *Hook* is completely incoherent, since it sends an amnesiac grownup Peter Pan back to Neverland to do battle with Captain Hook for the possession of Peter's children, who then in turn must be brought back to the real world where they will now flourish in the love of a properly attentive father. These events reduce to the formula "Peter must revert to childhood in order to be a more responsible adult." There is something excessively painful about the spectacle of a flightless Peter Pan, and about his desperate attempts to find the "happy thought" that will enable him to lift off. Adulthood is unfriendly to happy thoughts, and in another logical short circuit Peter has to find his in the recollection that he is a father. The gigantic clunking sets and cast-of-thousands choreography are hysterically insistent in the same way, as though committing more and more material resources to the problem will finally allow the movie to realize its anti-materialist theme, and by getting heavier and heavier it will finally be able to lift off the ground.

There is a pathos in all big, expensive movies that try to inflate inadequate base-material to epic dimensions, but *Hook* carries an extra sadness because, as for Capra, there is a lot at stake for Spielberg. Peter Pan will never exist until he believes in himself, until Spielberg believes in him; but Spielberg protests too stridently that he *does* have faith. The opposite perspective—that we are trapped in adulthood and that our lives are necessarily as pointless as Peter Banning's—is all too clear. And the power of that devastating grownup vision is evident in the absurdity of the story and the lengths the movie must go to to get where it wants to be.⁸ In the end the clumsy insistence on magical transformation looks desperate and dishonest. Once more (as in *Bambi* or *It's a Wonderful Life*) we see the blissfully happy ending haunted by an intimation of its own falseness, a climactic vision of perfect accord and redemptive transformation whose underlying doubts are expressed in its own histrionic insistence. The magic doesn't appear, it can't be conjured—only doggedly, unconvincingly manufactured through the very means it is trying to break free of.⁹

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (or sometimes *Artificial Intelligence: A.I.*) had its origins in a 1969 short story by British science fiction writer Brian Aldiss, "Supertoys Last All Summer Long."¹⁰ In the author's words, it:

...is the story of a young boy who, whatever he does, cannot please his mother. He is puzzled about this, not realizing that he is an android, a cunning construct of artificial intelligence, as is his one ally, his teddy bear. (vii)

It attracted the attention of Stanley Kubrick, unsurprisingly considering Kubrick's interest in technology and sentient computers and the story's bleak portrait of human selfishness and irresponsibility. Kubrick worked on it between acquiring it in 1982 and his death in 1999, so intensively at times that it was for years thought to be the next Kubrick movie, until pushed out of the way by *Eyes Wide Shut*. For a variety of reasons, he soon involved Spielberg, and at one point he even proposed, incredibly, that he should produce the film and Spielberg direct it. In the end Spielberg withdrew from the project. But when Kubrick died he inherited it, and what he inherited was substantial: a full treatment-cum-script that had been



A. I.



extensively massaged, hundreds of designs and storyboards, and a multitude of specific details. Looking at the existing movie, one can sometimes imagine the kind of film Kubrick would have made.

But *A.I.* as it exists also feels completely like a Spielberg film—and more than that, a Spielberg meta-film, a film about Spielberg films. The movie's protagonist is an android little boy who is expressly designed to feel emotion—specifically *love*, love for his “mother.” The world is eco-devastated and half-flooded, and in order to maintain high standards of living, breeding is restricted in the propertied elite classes. Licenses for these people to have real or “orga” children are rare, and so the Cybertronics corporation decides to create an artificial or “mecha” substitute. Its inventor, Professor Allen Hobby (William Hurt) enthuses about the prospect of “a love that will *never end*.” A Spielberg child who will love his mother perfectly and eternally is only one more manifestation of the idealist vision of *Close Encounters*, *E.T.* and *Hook*, and of Disney before them: it is again the perfect realm of pure feeling that these films aspire to and try to evoke. The brilliant stroke here, the stroke that sends the movie on the path to revisionist meta-Spielberg, is to make this perfect, magical child whose yearnings are sacred into a *product*. Hobby says:

Ours will be a perfect child, caught in a freeze frame, always loving, never ill, never changing. With all the couples yearning in vain for a license, our little mecha will not only open up a new market, it will fill a great human need.

We eventually discover that little David (Haley Joel Osment) is physically modeled on Hobby's own dead son David, and he is given to a couple, Monica (Frances O'Connor) and Henry (Sam Robards), whose own son Martin is lying in a cryogenically preserved coma. David is a product inspired by and directed towards the dreadful experience of loss, a consolation and a substitute for suffering people. He acts for these people as an extreme form of the consolation and substitution provided for audiences by idealist *movies*, especially the aspiring, bliss-and-transfiguration seeking movies of Steven Spielberg. When Hobby says that this perfect child will be “caught in a freeze frame,” it is hard to avoid thinking that *A.I.* is putting forward this idea at least semi-consciously.

The rest of the mecha world the film shows us presents the same picture. David's stuffed-animal friend Teddy is for children what David himself is for parents, a perfect playmate who never whines or gets tired or annoyed. David's eventual travelling companion Gigolo Joe (Jude Law) has been designed to provide romance, flattering attention, and sexual satisfaction for needy women. He too has his movie signifiers, with a built-in audio device that plays original recordings from old Dick Powell and Fred Astaire musicals. Of the two customers of Joe's whom we see, the first has apparently been beaten up by her human boyfriend, and the second is actually murdered by hers. Once more a mecha is used to make up for the pain and ugliness of actual human affairs. Joe has to take the rap for the murder, a crime committed by a human, just as David has to take the rap when he is manipulated and framed by the human child Martin, amazingly returned from his coma. Joe is a better human being than the violent men his women are running away from, and David is a better child than Martin (Jake Thomas), who is a recognizably regular kid—jealous, entitled and capable of malice. And he certainly deserves a better mother than the one he perfectly loves, who drives him out into the woods and abandons him (in a scene of child/parent trauma that out-horrors Disney).

Then we have the Flesh Fair, another manifestation of irrational human rage against the thinking commodities humanity has produced itself. In the Flesh Fair, derelict and unlicensed mechas are sensationally destroyed in front of screaming crowds of rednecks. Here is a class perspective, a festival of crude *lumpen*-populist resentment against the technological excesses of the privileged elite and its pet scientists, offering a spectacle of cruel destruction in the tones of a monster demolition derby + punk rock concert, all presented under the motto "A Celebration of Life." There's a relatively subtle point here, about the way in which underclasses are excluded from the pageant of materialist progress that is embodied in the most refined and expensive toys. But what is more obvious is the movie's fear of this particular audience. Once again we find the reflexive perspective. The Flesh Fair is a theatrical spectacle, a form of popular entertainment, where mechas are catapulted through propeller blades, or cut in half by chainsaws, or doused in buckets of acid. It is a grand guignol of sadistic violence practised against artificial entities that is all too reminiscent of the spectacles of our own action cinema, with its massive destruction and ingenious methods of violent death. If the products of idealist cinema (David, Joe) are too good for the world, and used by the world merely as convenient band-aids, then the products of blockbuster action cinema are merely the bread and circuses of an ugly and bloodthirsty audience and the betrayal of a potentially redemptive medium.

David and Joe, and all the mechas, are martyrs, victims of human insufficiency and selfishness. David in particular is harrowingly victimized—by the cold and selfish scientists, by his bullying sibling and the other kids, by his mother who abandons him, by the vicious killers at the Flesh Fair. The poor kid! He is like the victims and martyrs in Capra and Disney: John Doe with his microphone unplugged right in the middle of his big exculpatory speech, little Dumbo laughed at and torn away from his mother. And in the case of Capra's heroes, or Spielberg's, it is a humiliation and a suffering that comes in the course of a pure and noble quest. In *A.I.* the quest is the simplest and most innocent that can be imagined: a little boy wants to get his mother's love. But the wish is rendered derisory because it is tied to a situation where no solution is possible. Overhearing his mommy reading *Pinocchio* to Martin, David is entranced by the idea that he could become "a real boy," and once he has been abandoned he goes in search of the Blue Fairy so she can transform him in this way too.¹¹ Clearly there is no Blue Fairy, he can't become a "real boy," and his whole problem as he conceives it and its solution exist only in the realm of a fantasy-narrative, a *story*—as Capra and Disney are stories, as *Hook* is a story, and as *A.I.* is a story. Once more, this reflexive idea is marked with a degree of self-consciousness. As David is being left in the woods by his mother, the following anguished dialogue—an impassioned debate about the status of fiction—takes place:

DAVID: If *Pinocchio* became a real boy and I become a real boy can I come home?

MONICA: That's just a story.

DAVID: A story tells what happens.

MONICA: Stories are not real!

The movie is presenting a traumatic problem that can only be solved artificially, by telling lies and making things up. For a Spielberg "faith-is-our-salvation" film to present the necessary fictionality of any kind of positive development is an astonishing thing.

This agonizing, melodramatic spectacle is, of course, always redeemed in earlier films, even if sometimes only precariously and with a lingering sense that the fear was more substantial than the

happy ending. In *A.I.* it is redeemed too. After running all over the place and getting through a dozen dreadful scrapes, David finds the Blue Fairy in the form of a wooden statue of her in the submerged Coney Island Pinocchio theme-park; he remains there for centuries staring fixedly at this dead form and praying to her to be made real so his mommy will love him. Finally he is rescued by super-robots 2000 years in the future, after the extinction of mankind, and fixed up with an elaborate simulation of his home, including a simulation of his mother, who can be cloned from the DNA in a lock of her hair. And this mother will not be the complicated and unpredictable original one, but now perfectly the mother that David desires. As the super-android narrator tells us (in the infinitely kind- and wise-sounding voice of Ben Kingsley):

All the problems seemed to have disappeared from Mommy's mind. There was no Henry. There was no Martin. There was no grief. There was only David.

Here is the movie's happy ending—a perfect artificial mother for the perfect artificial child. But the movie rejects this solution. Cloned persons only last for a single day, so this final attainment of the goal, made supremely fulfilling by its protracted history and its constant deferral, is brutally evanescent. There is really nothing to soften for us the spectacle of a little kid who only wants to find his mommy, and for his mommy to love him, but what he gets is endless futile prayer to a nonexistent fairy and 12 hours with the sanitized projection of a person who has been dead for two millennia.

Here perhaps we can taste Kubrick's sour misanthropy. But, again, Spielberg has made it completely his own. In characteristic fashion, he has drawn out and heightened the ending of the film to an extreme. In fact the movie has three successive endings, each of them played to the full. The first one, a tragic ending, comes when David has at last found Professor Hobby, but instead of the Blue Fairy and his mother's love he only meets appalling evidence of his own artificiality. He encounters a clone of himself who offers to be his friend (his response is to say fiercely "You can't have her!" and beat the other little David into scrap metal, in his closest approximation to humanity as depicted by the movie). Wandering into the next room, he finds rows of boxes containing identical "Davids" or "Darlenes," each labelled with the motto: "At Last, A Love of Your Own." His authenticity is shattered, his unique subjectivity terrifyingly revealed as socially produced and commodified. After this, he perches (like Capra's John Doe) on the skyscraper's high window ledge, murmurs "Mommy!" and plunges to a suicide's death. Except he isn't killed, but rather ends up under the sea, in front of the Coney Island Blue Fairy, where his pose of frozen eternal prayer and eternal hope constitutes the sad and beautiful second ending.

Spielberg's will to a positive resolution is very strong, and perhaps accounts for this unwillingness to settle for what at first presents itself. The tragic ending is rejected; the second ending, not so harsh, is also too bleak. The third ending, as I said, is then set up to be the happy one, but even its strainings and gyrations cannot truly alter the situation, and instead it only twists the knife further. The one day with Monica is truly ideal, a perfect round of a child's happiness in making coffee for Mommy, getting his hair washed, drawing pictures for her, playing hide and seek, and, finally, at bedtime, hearing the magic words, "I do love you, David ... I've always loved you." Here is the acceptance and tenderness he has always longed for, again the blissful conclusion to make up for all the pain, the Capra and Disney and Spielberg ending. And it is that ending: Spielberg invests it with all the sweetness and intensity and physical beauty at his command, and, as in *Close Encounters*



David with Gigolo Joe.

and *E.T.*, John Williams is once again working overtime to lift us on bigger and more billowy clouds of feeling. This mode is not only totally unlike anything in Kubrick, it's a kind of definition of *anti-Kubrick*. Of course what is different about this Spielberg ending is that it is explicitly labelled as a lying fantasy. Its fraudulence is clear, but Spielberg still cannot let go of the heartbreaking beauty of the ideal

Professor Hobby, in a speech to David that is trying to console him for his disappointment but as usual comes across as insensitive and self-absorbed, tells him of the excitement of the team of scientists remotely observing his adventures:

Where would your self-motivated reasoning take you? To the logical conclusion—that the Blue Fairy is part of the great human flaw, to wish for things that don't exist? Or to the greatest single human gift—the ability to chase down our dreams?

This is the movie in a nutshell. On the one hand, the Blue Fairy, the magical resolution, doesn't exist, and looking for it is absurd and pathetic. On the other hand, in the phrase "chase down our dreams" we recognize the sacred mantra of Hollywood and America in general: this is something that is always good and never bad. Yet the film demonstrates explicitly that these dreams can't be chased down, or if they can it is only to find that they are as false as the Coney Island statue. Idealism will crush you in the



end, that's the message of that. "The greatest single human gift" then becomes the ability to delude ourselves, fatuously and cruelly, with longings that can't be fulfilled and with imaginative projections of perfection that can never be attained.

This perspective is actually in complete accord with that undercurrent of anxiety leading to despair that lies under all of Spielberg's messianic dreams of bliss. The inadequacy of ordinary human life in *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* and *Hook*, and the necessity to redeem it by some intervention from outside the human sphere, is seen again with complete clarity in *A.I.* Now ordinary human life has become simply a catalogue of sins and failings. Only David is innocent—David and Teddy and Joe and the other mechas we see. And when the dimension of the ideal is finally reached it is in this same realm of artifice, in the super-androids at the end of the film. These machines are more important for their emotional perfection than their technical superiority. (They are also

iconically very suggestive of the benevolent space-alien of *Close Encounters*, and they serve the same function in *A.I.*) Like David, but unlike human beings, these are creatures who can love properly, and it is they who extend to David the tenderness and care that no humans ever did, including his mother. If in Disney's *Pinocchio* there was subtextually always something rather disturbing and even sinister about "becoming real," in *A.I.* it just represents a straightforward degeneration: why would you want to be human? It's not that humans are monsters, exactly. The film actually has a good deal of sympathy for Monica, and is also able to see Martin's point of view to an extent, and even the Flesh Fair people are not without their reasons. But even the best of them are human beings, they have severe limitations and are deflected from true sight by their own emotional chaos—and warts like these are just what are unacceptable in the bliss-filled visions of Disney and Spielberg.

The notion that the ideal must be *imagined* and *artificially manufactured* if it is to exist at all is at the core of the meta-Spielberg nature of *A.I.* If instead of a futuristic scenario where technology can produce creepily convincing simulacra of people, we substitute an entirely contemporary scenario where *movies* can produce creepily convincing simulacra of people, we find ourselves right in Spielberg's kitchen. Earlier Spielberg films faintly signalled this perspective in their quotation of and reverence for Disney movies, but now the idea is much more self-conscious and reflexive. Only in movies can you find perfectly wise and benevolent beings like Disney's Blue Fairy and Spielberg's aliens, and in fact only in movies can you find perfectly desiring subjects like Capra's Jimmy Stewart characters, Disney's child-protagonists, and Spielberg's David. When this ideal subject is explicitly revealed as the assembly-line product of an industry, the effect, in Spielberg's world, is devastating because it presents unmistakably the falseness of Spielbergian movie idealism. According to *A.I.*, the only way to make a truly good child, a child who will love his mother unconditionally, is to machine-make one—to movie-make one; and the only way to make a human parent who will love him back is—well, there isn't any way. The idealism embodied in David is manufactured and marketed, but it is still, in Spielberg's eyes, the highest goal we have, and as a matter of fact actual humans are unworthy of these ideals imagined for their betterment—unworthy of the androids of *A.I.*, unworthy of the pure emotional yearnings of Spielberg movies.

This, then, is the Agony of Steven Spielberg. For most of his career he has held a dream of the spiritual potency of idealist cinema. He has felt that the pain and darkness of the world could be redeemed by a vision of innocence, the innocence of a child at a birthday party or at a Disney movie. He has exhorted his viewers to have faith in that vision, to believe in it instead of the messy disappointment of real life. Many of his films have been precisely vehicles for a cinematic deliverance from human limitation. How many lingering closeups are there in *A.I.* of little David, the child who represents everything pure about the human spirit, brimming with innocent longing, praying fervently, begging abjectly? Many, many—and each of them carries a kind of emotional hammerblow, partly thanks to Haley Joel Osment's wonderful performance, and partly to Spielberg's practised skill. The culmination of this movement comes in the undersea eternity of supplication, and in the one day with Mommy. For almost the whole of this time, about half an hour, the film floats in that Spielbergian suspension of reality, that realm of magic which is the projected world of human hopes and wishes, as David inhabits the zone of proximity to the goal of his quest. Here, Spielberg just opens the tap and lets the feeling flow. Perhaps never in his career has he

done so as successfully as in these scenes. This protracted ending of the film has Spielberg's transcendental aspirations going full bore. But at the same time there is an equally strong awareness that all this love, and faith, and stainless rapture and longing, are *lies*. In truth it is a martyrdom: an enactment of a faith that can no longer believe, a longing that recognizes its object as something that absolutely does not exist. At the end of the day, when David's mother goes to sleep, never to reawaken, David too goes to sleep for the first time; and although the kindly super-android's voiceover tells us it is to enter the realm of dreams, it is likely that he too will never wake up. Death would certainly be a release for him, the only release, and it is hard to see what his benevolent keepers could do for him that would be as good.

The realm of eternity, always the province of the spiritual and always set against the world of materialism, has now become possible only in the material world of technology and artifice. And the idealistic wish to transcend limitation and mortality is also, amazingly, pulled into that material-artificial-technological world in the wake of the human failure to transcend. Yet transcendence cannot truly be removed from its human context; David still wants his human mother and his love remains a distillation of a human emotion. The ultimate incommensurability of flawed humanity and perfect artifice results in a tragic impasse. Death cannot be escaped. Instead, it is now greeted with relief as the only way to end an impossible yearning, the yearning of the transcendent (non)human subject, and the yearning of Steven Spielberg's cinema.

In a wider context, *A.I.* is one more contribution to the culture-wide working out of anxieties about personal identity in the contemporary American world. For us reluctant postmoderns, being a "real" person means having some kind of essential human identity that can't be copied or cloned or technically synthesized; we hope that we *can't* synthesize human nature, despite all the evidence that maybe we can. Movies are primary examples of this evidence, in some ways the most elaborate forms of the virtual culture that surrounds us. In a reified, material-values social world, we are dependent on movie models for how to feel and how to act. Movies and TV, especially movies, are constantly preaching the gospel of feelings over interest, kindness and generosity over selfishness, basic human commitment over technology and toys and power, and that material values will kill us and we need to return to love. Of course the ironies of this gospel are very thick when movies are amongst the most expensive technologically advanced toys, and biggest commodities, there are. And the consciousness of this contradiction keeps sneaking into movies themselves (from *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show* to *A.I.*). We are seeking reassurance, then, that our *affective* life isn't as manipulable as a movie script or Industrial Light and Magic special effects, and that our real values are human values and not just power-and-money or commodity-fetishist ones. Yet, to repeat, our affective lives are schooled by movies. So it is logical that for Spielberg, whose sense of the affective power of movies is stronger than anybody's, movies are somehow the repository of ultimate human ideals and human values. To many people this just seems bizarre and pathetic; but again there is a logic in Spielberg's belief. In a society where everything is fake, movie fakery, with its traditions of idealism and human values and reassurance, is the best there is—a truly post-modern perception. And yet it is doubtful that, at least before *A.I.*, Spielberg ever actually had the thought "everything is fake," or "movie fakery is as authentic as anything is." But in *A.I.* he really does seem to have it.

A.I., then, is for me the fullest imaginable expression of the dark underside of Spielberg's cinema. It is not an expressionist

nightmare, like the hellish Pottertown experienced by the hero of *It's a Wonderful Life*. It is stranger than that—the hell of a heaven whose bliss is consciously understood as not existing. Its misanthropy, unlike Kubrick's, is regretful rather than angry; but it is none the less potent for that. The film is a work of extraordinary self-deconstruction, especially coming from the most commercially successful filmmaker ever. In my view it is Spielberg's best film, and more truly disturbing and challenging than his overtly serious message movies like *Schindler's List* or *Saving Private Ryan*. Doubtless Spielberg will go on to make *Jurassic Park 4* and *Indiana Jones 4* as if he had never had this moment—though it is interesting that both *Minority Report* and *Catch Me If You Can* (and to a degree even *The Terminal*) remain fixated on ideas of believing in what isn't there and on the manufacture of fake or virtual history and identity, and thus repeat the reflexive perspective I have referred to in *A.I.* But even if he does return to making movie fast-food, *A.I.* will remain an astonishing testament to the fact that once, at least, Spielberg really looked into the mirror, and became a creature of melancholy.

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Notes

- 1 Tim Kreider, "A.I.: Artificial Intelligence," *Film Quarterly*, 56.2 (Winter 2002-03), 32-39.
- 2 The application of this philosophy to Spielberg is very clear, but it is just as clear in some of the prominent work of Spielberg descendants such as Ron Howard (*Cocoon*, 1985) and Robert Zemeckis (*Forrest Gump*, 1994). Of course it might also be seen as the motto of the entire Reagan era.
- 3 Henry Sheehan, "Spielberg II" (*Film Comment*, July-August 1992, 66-71), 69.
- 4 Joseph McBride, *Spielberg: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 42. McBride is paraphrasing Dan Kiley's 1983 book *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up*.
- 5 This perspective has been advanced by some critics right from the beginning. See for example Steven Farber, who in his review ("Close Encounters: Smooth Takeoff, Bumpy Landing," *New West*, Dec. 5, 1977, 26-27), calls *Close Encounters* "a hymn to regression and emotional retardation" (27).
- 6 At least in the recut "Special Edition" of the film released in 1980 and now the reigning version on video. The original version also had the tune in the score initially, but it was removed after preview screenings because (in special effects director Douglas Trumbull's words) "it was too cornball and too referential to something else that took you out of the mood...." (McBride, *op. cit.*, 287). Apparently for Spielberg the urge to make that reference was just too strong to be ignored. According to McBride (262), the whole film was importantly inspired by two different moments from early Disney animated features—"When You Wish Upon a Star" and the "Night on Bald Mountain" sequence from *Fantasia* (1940).
- 7 Cf. McBride, *op. cit.*, 399 ("aesthetically unsatisfactory but nakedly autobiographical"), and Douglas Brodie, *The Films of Steven Spielberg* (New York: Citadel, 1995, rev. ed. 2000), 204.
- 8 Terrence Rafferty, reviewing the film in *The New Yorker* ("Fear of Flying," Dec. 30, 1991, 78-9), talks about the "profound weariness in Steven Spielberg's attitude toward his art and his audience," and the way "the imagination seems like a burden—a terrible, crushing obligation" in the film (79).
- 9 Alone among Spielberg commentators, Henry Sheehan ("The Panning of Steven Spielberg" [*Film Comment*, May-June 1992, 54-60] and "Spielberg II," *loc. cit.*) asserts that *Hook* is amongst the most mature and fully-realized of Spielberg's films to that time ("with *Hook*, Spielberg establishes himself not just as a mere commercial force but as a major artistic personality and a legitimate aspirant to greatness" ["Panning," 54]). He makes an interesting argument—for example, that *Hook* is Peter's irresponsible, child-hating dark side—but he seems oblivious to the film's heaviness and hysteria.
- 10 Brian Aldiss, *Supertoys Last All Summer Long and Other Stories of Future Time* (London: Orbit, 2001).
- 11 The way *A.I.* deliberately traces over and "remakes" *Pinocchio* is something that was definitely part of the original Kubrick project (he apparently referred to it routinely as "the *Pinocchio* film"). But even though Spielberg did not invent this perspective, it is so uncannily relevant to his own sources of inspiration that we can say with no exaggeration that he might just as well have. Perhaps, indeed, it is one of the things that caused Kubrick to think of the project as something suited to Spielberg in the first place.

METROPO

RESTORATION, REEVALUATION

BY SUSAN SMITH

In view of the narrative preoccupation in *Metropolis* with various forms of creation, destruction and reconstruction, it is ironic that the film should itself have undergone a complex version of such processes during the course of its eventful history. Originally premiered in Berlin in January 1927, the film which 'Lang envisioned ... as the "costliest and most ambitious picture ever" made in Europe' (see Patrick McGilligan, *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast*, Faber and Faber, London, 1997, p.110), was subjected to extensive cutting and re-editing by the producers prior to its release in America and its re-release in Germany in March and August respectively of that same year. Given that the versions now known are substantially shorter than the original and that much of the deleted footage (including intertitles) is now seemingly lost, it is tempting to concur with Enno Patalas' view that '*Metropolis* has been thoroughly and irreparably destroyed, as few other films have been' ('*Metropolis*, Scene 103' in *Camera Obscura* No. 15, Fall 1986, p.166).

Yet, important restoration work carried out on *Metropolis* in recent decades has enabled us to arrive at a much fuller, if still incomplete, sense of how the film was originally constituted. Giorgio Moroder's controversial 1984 rock-score version of *Metropolis* (which drew on some of Patalas's early restoration work on the film) and the more recent and extensively restored version of the film that was released by the Eureka label on DVD in 2003 (with Gottfried Huppertz's original musical score

reinstated on the soundtrack) have both made possible a reappraisal of the film's overall strategies and concerns. In particular, they help to reconfigure our understanding of two key (and, in my opinion, interconnected) relationships: that between the Master of Metropolis, Joh Fredersen (Alfred Abel) and the city over which he presides, and that between Lang and German Expressionism.

The restorations carried out so far are, of course, partial, meaning that we are in effect dealing with a composite movie made up of several intermediate, incomplete versions of the original text, the various changes and reformulations rendering any critical evaluation necessarily tentative. Most unsettling of all, in terms of its impact upon the act of interpretation itself, is the mutilation of the original. For this has served to invest the narration with a form of unreliability quite different from that so coherently and deliberately deployed by Lang in some of his American films (for key writing on these aspects of the director's work, see George Wilson, 'Fritz Lang's You Only Live Once' in *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986; see also Douglas Pye, 'Seeing By Glimpses: Fritz Lang's *The Blue Gardenia*' in *CineAction*, Summer 1988 and 'Film Noir and Suppressive Narrative: Beyond A Reasonable Doubt' in Ian Cameron, ed., *The Movie Book of Film Noir*, Studio Vista, London, 1992). The strategy of suppressive narrative that Pye considers to be so purposefully at work in Lang's final American film, *Beyond A Reasonable Doubt*

(1956)—often manifesting itself in a 'topping and tailing' of scenes (Pye, 1992, p.104)—thus finds its bizarre, arbitrary counterpart in the excision of entire scenes and sub-plots from *Metropolis*, the misleading effect of which is heightened by the cutter's tendency to introduce false motives (often in the form of new intertitles) to explain the characters' otherwise puzzling behaviour.

This is not to suggest that all of the difficulties of interpretation posed by the film can be attributed to haphazard, insensitive cutting. Indeed, much of the critical attention paid to *Metropolis* in the past has sought to explain certain contradictions and instances of textual incoherence in terms of the film's own confused political stance towards its subject matter, all of which has been seen to be symptomatic, in turn, of certain tensions and tendencies within Weimar culture itself.

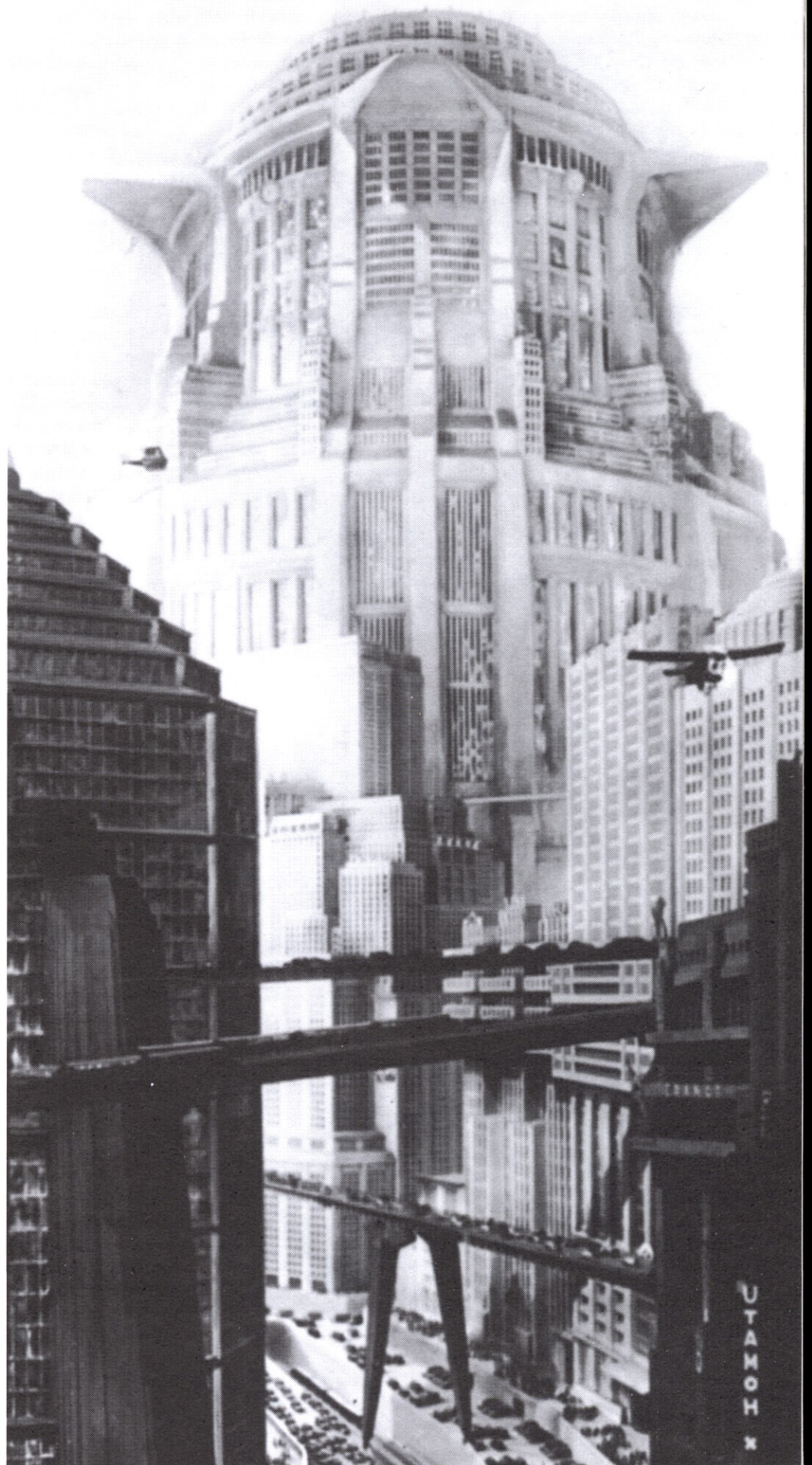
In his seminal book, *From Caligari to Hitler*, for example, Siegfried Kracauer argues that, in showing Freder (Gustav Frohlich) attempting to rebel against his father's tyrannical rule by joining the workers in the underground city, only to become instrumental in effecting a reconciliation between labour and capital at the end, the film ultimately exhibits a desire, on the part of the German soul, to 'affirm [...] authoritarian behaviour precisely by stressing rebellion against it' (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*,

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Princeton University Press, 1947, p.162). In an approach that seeks to distance itself from Kracauer's overly reflective, overly generalised reading of German cinema, John Tulloch argues that *Metropolis* enacts a specific attempt on the part of the mandarin, intellectual class in German society to fight back against what it perceives to be the alienating, threatening forces of industrialisation: 'an attempt under provocation to impose a new synthesis, a renewed order, a different construction of reality' (Tulloch, 'Genetic Structuralism and the Cinema—A Look at Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*' in *The Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, 1976, p.25).

For Tulloch, the film's ambivalent depiction of the workers—first as oppressed victims of a brutal regime and then, during the rebellion, as a terrifying, anarchic mob whose attacks on the machines threaten to endanger even the lives of their own children—reflects the problematic position of the intellectual who deplores physical violence while wishing to see the destruction of the dehumanising industrial systems emerging in early twentieth-century Germany. Maria's (Brigitte Helm's) quasi-religious appeal for the heart to act as 'mediator' between 'head' and 'hands' reflects the feeling that this should be effected through spiritual rather than violent means.

Rejecting a traditional ideological critique, on the grounds that it is liable to contain 'blind spots' that 'lock us into a one-dimensional reading of the film', Andreas Huyssen



seeks to explain *Metropolis*'s contradictory stance towards the workers' rebellion in terms of an ambivalence in German society towards not only technology but also the figure of woman herself (Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*' in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Macmillan Press, London, 1988, p.66). For Huyssen, then, 'the double male fear of technology and of woman' (p.71) is projected or collapsed onto the figure of the female robot in order that it may be 'metaphorically purged' via the workers' burning of the false Maria at the stake (p.81).

While these readings constitute important attempts to understand the film in terms of the culture from which it emerged, their reliance upon pre-restored versions of *Metropolis* at times leads them to over emphasize or even misconstrue the lack of coherence within it. What I wish to explore here is the way in which the partial reinstatement of one particular key segment in both restored versions of *Metropolis* has had the effect, not of resolving the film's ideologically fraught political scenario, but, rather, of providing an alternative explanatory framework for understanding its role within the film. The sequence in question is the one that leads up to and deals with the robot's first appearance. In outlining the key elements of this episode here I have mainly followed the account provided in the 2003 DVD version of the film as this seems to offer a fuller sequencing of events, especially with regard to the initial passage dealing with the dead woman Hel. As well as including the original intertitles and certain restored pieces of footage, this later version also provides (by way of new intertitles) some useful plot summaries designed to fill in the gaps created by the remaining missing footage. It begins with the following original intertitle:

**In the middle of Metropolis
there was a strange house,
overlooked by the centuries.**

After a shot of the house, a second intertitle explains that:

**The man who lived in it
was Rotwang, the inventor.**

Following a sequence of shots showing Rotwang (Rudolf Klein-Rogge) sitting at his desk as his servant enters the laboratory to announce Fredersen's arrival, a plot summary is then provided via newly created intertitles:

**In a high, gloomy room of the
old house, Joh Fredersen
waits for Rotwang.**

He notices a small alcove concealed by a curtain. He draws it open.

**There, on a pedestal as wide
as a wall and as tall as a man,
he sees the stone head of a woman.**

A striking image of this stone head of a woman then appears, with the name HEL prominently inscribed in large lettering on the pedestal beneath. Another new plot summary intertitle goes on to describe how:

**Joh Fredersen's eyes
fall on the words
engraved on the pedestal.**

This is followed by a shot of a large stone base bearing Rotwang's epitaph to this female:

**BORN
FOR MY HAPPINESS AND MANKIND'S BLESSING
LOST
TO JOH FREDERSEN
DIED
GIVING BIRTH TO FREDER, JOH FREDERSEN'S SON**

After a close-up showing Fredersen staring intently at this monument to his dead wife (now positioned off screen), another series of plot summary intertitles covers the ensuing encounter between Rotwang and the Master of Metropolis:

**Rotwang has silently entered
the room with the monument.
Furious, he tears closed the curtain
in front of the bust.**

**The angrier Rotwang becomes,
the calmer grows Joh Fredersen.**

**"A brain like yours, Rotwang,"
he says to the raving man,
"should be able to forget..."**

In the next shot, Rotwang gesticulates wildly at Fredersen while the following intertitle conveys the inventor's angry retort:

**"Only once in my life
did I forget anything:
that Hel was a woman,
and you a man..."**

After a shot showing Fredersen standing in the middle of the frame while Rotwang's hand reaches in towards him from the right, another intertitle details the Master of Metropolis's further attempt to appease the inventor:

**"Let the dead rest in peace,
Rotwang...
For you, as for me, she is dead....."**

Not placated by this, Rotwang's intense, obsessive state of mind is captured in the following close-up of him as he stares excitedly in the direction of the camera before shaking his head vigorously and laughing. After more forceful gesturing with his arms in the next shot, as he faces Fredersen in profile, Rotwang's triumphant verbal response is provided in the next caption:

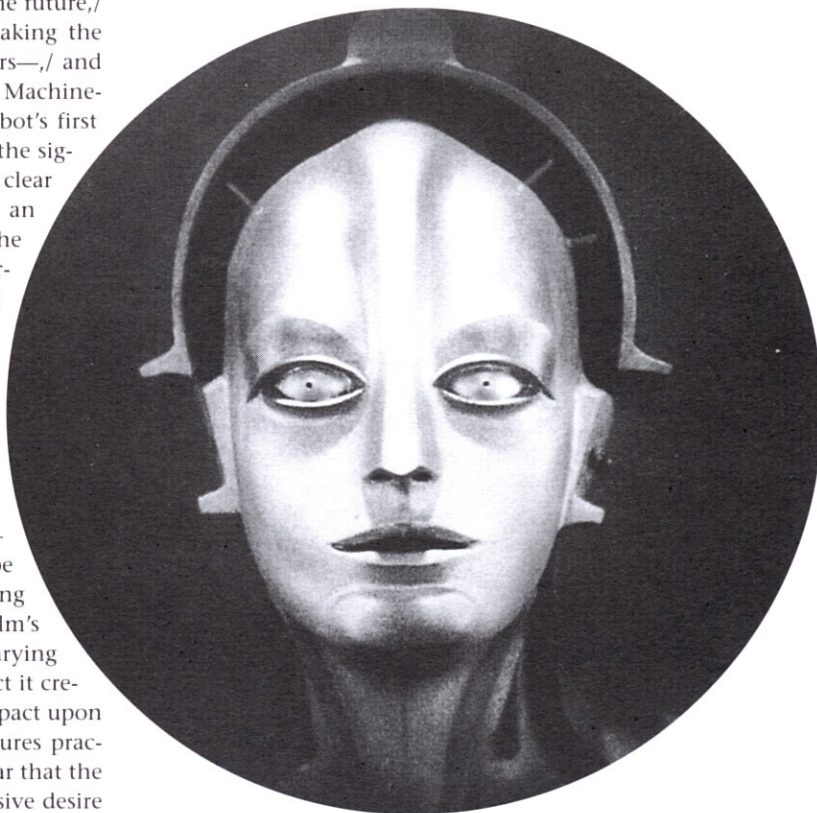
**"For me, she is not dead,
Joh Fredersen,
for me, she lives—!"**

After revealing, via a sequence of further shots and intertitles, that he has lost his right hand in the making of his invention ("Do you think/ that losing a hand/ is too high a price to pay/ for re-creating Hel—?!" he asks), Rotwang takes Fredersen up the stairs into his laboratory. There he pulls a curtain aside to reveal a female robot which he then instructs to move forward and greet the Master of Metropolis. Apart from the inclusion of two puzzling intertitles which, going against the grain of the other restored ele-

ments here, seem to gesture briefly towards a more general role and male identity for the robot ("So, Joh Fredersen—?!/ Isn't it worth/ the loss of a hand to have/ created the man of the future,/ the/ Machine—Man—?!") says Rotwang before then making the following offer to Fredersen: "Give me another 24 hours—,/ and no one, Joh Fredersen,/ no one will be able/ to tell a Machine-Man/ from a mortal—!") this sequence showing the robot's first appearance continues, in all other respects, to build on the significance of the preceding section about Hel by making clear that Rotwang's invention of the robot constitutes an attempt not just to recreate his lost love but, in the process, to wrest control of this dead woman from his former friend and rival. "The woman is mine, Joh Fredersen!/ The son of Hel was yours!" exclaims Rotwang triumphantly as he raises his arms up in the air in a manner that, by encircling the robot as it stands behind him, visually reinforces this assertion of ownership.

Having identified the key elements of this restored sequence, then, it is possible to see how, when the censors cut out all reference to Fredersen's dead wife—apparently fearing that the German name 'Hel' would be wrongly equated with the word 'hell' by English-speaking audiences (see Patalas, p.170)—they took away the film's emotional and psychological core. Reinstated to varying degrees in the 1984 and 2003 restored versions, the effect it creates is as significant, in its potentially transformative impact upon the meaning of the film, as any of the surprise disclosures practiced in other Lang texts. Most obviously, by making clear that the inventor's building of the robot is born out of an obsessive desire to recreate and repossess the dead woman Hel, rather than simply being the product of some subservient wish to help Fredersen by producing an efficient machine to replace the workers (the latter being the only explanation provided in the cut versions), this sequence radically affects our understanding of Rotwang whose story, Patalas argues, was 'For Harbou and Lang, ... a story of Hate, Murder and Revenge, with a complex motivation' (Patalas, p.170).

The sequence is particularly important in making us aware of the dilemma faced by Rotwang when Fredersen instructs him, later on in the film, to transform the robot into the likeness of Maria, the underground leader of the workers city. For, viewed in the light of these earlier insights into Rotwang's character, this instruction appears, from the inventor's perspective, like an attempt by Fredersen to take Hel away from him once again. That Rotwang is both alert and resistant to the implications of Fredersen's demands is conveyed quite clearly by two telling gestures on the inventor's part at critical moments. The first is his facial grimace almost immediately after Fredersen has instructed him to transform the robot into Maria's likeness (the camera having lingered on Rotwang for a moment following the departure of the Master of Metropolis from the scene). The second takes place during the later scene in the laboratory when, just before pulling the lever to start the transformation process, Rotwang pauses and closes his eyes, as if steeling himself to the task in hand. That the robot version of Maria should then run out of control and threaten Fredersen's kingdom can be read, in turn, as a revenge enacted by the machine on behalf of its creator. The 2003 DVD version even invites us to read Rotwang's plan of revenge as involving a desire to wrest not just Hel but Freder too from the Master of Metropolis' control. Having provided a shot (also there



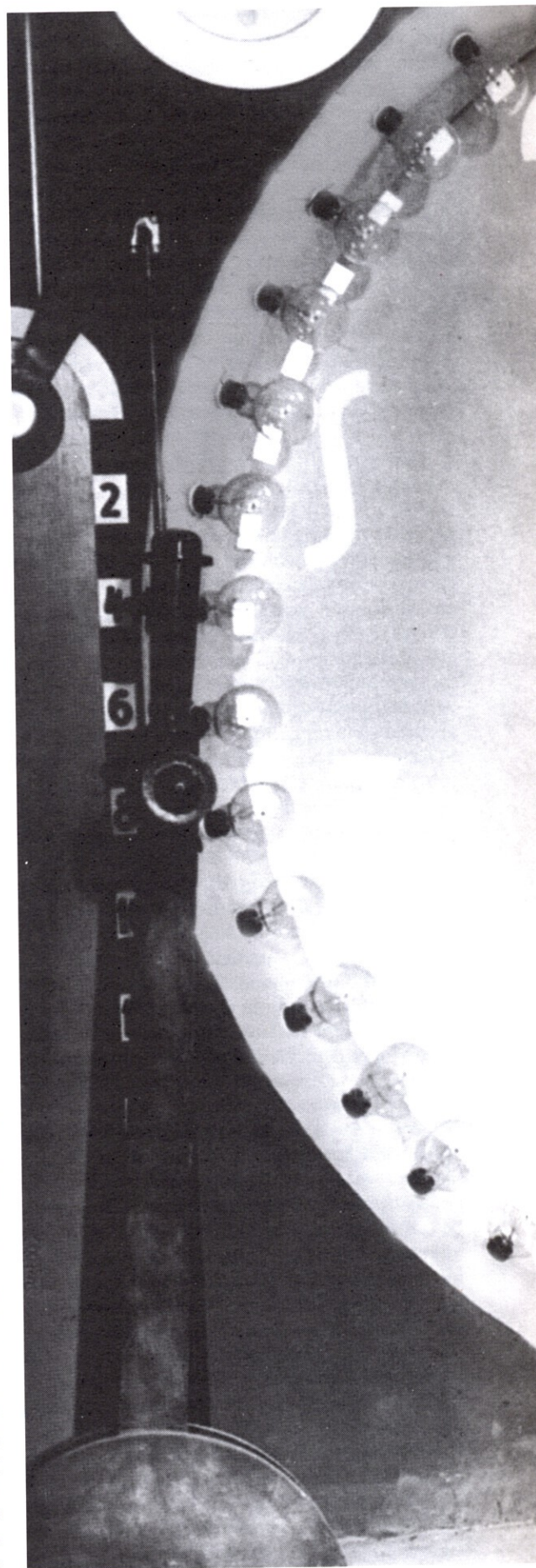
in the Moroder version) showing Rotwang shielding Freder's romantic encounter with Maria from Fredersen's view during the scene down in the catacombs (as the inventor spies through the hole in the wall he can clearly be seen using his body to block Fredersen's field of vision), this particular version proceeds to draw out the implications of this moment more fully by having the following intertitle appear just as Rotwang is shown looking resentfully on as Fredersen exits from the scene:

**"You fool!
Now you will lose
the one remaining thing
you have from Hel
—your son!"**

In doing so, the film invites us to construe Rotwang's acquiescence to Fredersen's instruction to transform the robot into Maria's likeness as evidence not simply of some passive surrendering of control on his part but of a more calculated desire to exploit this situation to his advantage. For, by denying Fredersen any knowledge of Freder's newly formed attachment to the very woman whose image he (Fredersen) now seeks to manipulate, Rotwang behaves in a manner that seems designed to cause a rift between the Master of Metropolis and his son. As Patalas observes, in his voice-over commentary to the 2003 DVD version, the question raised here is: 'Will Rotwang give up his project to create Hel or will he extend it, if it can be used to steal his rival's son from him?'

What is even more significant and far-reaching about the restored sequence, I think, is the way in which it invites us to see Rotwang, by virtue of his obsession with Fredersen's dead wife and his desire to bring her back to life, as representing a repressed side to the Master of Metropolis' *own* character. It is a possibility that is enacted quite noticeably in performance terms, with Rudolf Klein-Rogge's highly extravagant, Expressionist acting providing the perfect counterpoint to Alfred Abel's self-contained, almost perfunctory behaviour as ruler of the city. Two particular moments of performance detail also serve to highlight Rotwang's role as Fredersen's mirror image. The first occurs, appropriately, during the unveiling of the robot itself when, in a dramatic gesture of disclosure that reverses the Master of Metropolis's action in an earlier scene of closing the curtains to his office, Rotwang vigorously pulls aside the curtains of his laboratory to reveal his new creation. The second instance arises shortly afterwards when Fredersen refrains from responding when the robot holds out its hand to him: in contrast to Rotwang's willingness to give up *his* hand quite literally in order to bring about this reconstruction of the lost female, Fredersen's withholding of the handshake here hints at an inability or refusal to acknowledge anything that might re-awaken his feelings for his dead wife. In view of the handshake's traditional role as a gesture of reconciliation, not just welcome, Fredersen's refusal to shake hands may even imply a lingering resentment on his part towards Hel.

That the loss of Hel has, in fact, been a source of much emotional pain to this enigmatic male character is hinted at quite strongly in the Moroder version during the sequence where Fredersen is attributed (via one of the subtitles) with the following response to Rotwang's claim that all the robot now needs is a 'soul': 'You're mistaken! It is better without one'. Rather than simply conforming to Kracauer's notion of the tyrant figure in German Expressionist cinema or John Tulloch's description of Fredersen as a 'coldly cerebral and soulless master of Metropolis' (Tulloch, p.10), the Alfred Abel character's reply here contains an acknowledgement that, unlike the robot, he *does* possess a 'soul', together with an implied wish to gain the machine's immunity from the emotional suffering that comes with it. This sense of gaining momentary access to Fredersen's inner thoughts is frustratingly qualified, however, by the fact that Alfred Abel's lips do not move at any point during the shot concerned, the implication being that this piece of dialogue has been transposed from another, presumably lost, piece of footage. And while this exchange of dialogue is not included in the 2003 DVD version (but is replaced by those two previously mentioned intertitles in which Rotwang refers to building a machine man of the future), the visu-





al and musical qualities of this later reconstruction of the unveiling sequence both serve to suggest the deeply personal impact that the robot's appearance has on Fredersen and its ability (contrary to the Master of Metropolis' earlier exhortations to Rotwang to forget the dead woman) to bring his suppressed feelings about Hel to the surface. This is most evident in the shot (not present in the Moroder version) that occurs towards the end of this encounter when Fredersen raises his hands to his head in a manner that (anticipating his response to Rotwang's climactic struggle with Freder and the inventor's death at the end of the film), seems to convey his sense of emotional disorientation and distress on being forced to confront this reminder of his dead wife.

The likelihood that Fredersen was intended to have a more complex, sympathetic side is lent greater credence by Patalas' written account of how the original censorship cards for the film refer to the Master of Metropolis as 'gentler than usual' at one point during this scene (see Patalas, p.169). The ensuing cut (a variation on which can also be found in the Moroder version) from a shot showing Fredersen's tense, anxious expression as he stares intently at the robot, to a close-up of the machine's face, develops this idea by evoking a sense of the character's fascination with such an extreme embodiment of emotional immunity. What Fredersen would seem to see in this robot figure, then, is not just a disconcerting attempt to recreate his dead wife but an image of the emotionally impervious persona that he himself seeks to adopt as a screen for his suppressed feelings. This sense of a male affinity with the robot is foregrounded (characteristically) in more extravagant form by Rotwang who, having watched the robot extend its hand towards Fredersen and the Master of Metropolis draw back apprehensively, proceeds to thrust his *own* mechanical hand forwards so that at one point it becomes momentarily superimposed over hers. This link with the machine is further developed by Rotwang's action of raising both arms above his head in a gesture that, by encircling the robot standing behind him, not only expresses the possessiveness he feels towards his invention (as suggested earlier) but also invites us to construe this figure as a physical extension of himself.

In establishing such complex forms of doubling—that is, between Hel and the robot, between Rotwang and the robot, and between Fredersen and Rotwang—this restored sequence provides a highly instructive model for understanding the nature of Fredersen's relationship to the near-robotic workforce under *his* control. In retrospect, the opening images of the workers shown shuffling, automaton-like, along the corridor in an anonymous, lifeless mass, can be seen as expressive not just of their own oppression and lack of identity under the Master of Metropolis' regime but also of Fredersen's own dehumanised state, an externalisation onto the world around him of an otherwise unacknowledged sense of emotional desolation and loss of purpose following the death of his wife.

Construing the relationship between Fredersen and his workforce in this way suggests that a more complex, coherent rationale underpins the film's Expressionist design than has generally been thought to be the case. In projecting one character's feelings onto the bodily form and movement of another set of characters, the film offers an interesting instance, from the German Expressionist period, of what George Wilson refers to as 'indirect or reflected subjectivity', in the sense that it is able to use its stylistic features to convey the central character's inner state *despite* the fact that 'the action is only partially, if at all, seen from his . . . physical point of view' (Wilson, *Narration in Light*, p.87). As Wilson observes, the 'basic idea is to let properties of the way in which the fictional world looks to us on screen stand in for properties of the

way in which that world is experienced by the character' (ibid.). In the case of *Metropolis*, this notion of reflected subjectivity is lent particular credibility because Fredersen, as ruler of the fictional world he inhabits, occupies a privileged narrative position that equips him with the power to influence not only the other characters' various moods and behaviour but also the city's overall rhythms and appearance.

The structuring of the fictional world according to various levels above and below ground also invites us to consider this notion of reflected subjectivity psychoanalytically: the modern city on the surface easily readable as a Freudian metaphor for the more civilised, conscious area of the Master of Metropolis's male psyche; the underground realm (itself made up of three main levels) constituting its more hidden, subconscious side. In the former case, Metropolis's futuristic cityscape would seem particularly indicative of a desire on its ruler's part to break free from the oppressive memory of his past, although the medieval cathedral that stands in the middle of the city (complete with its statues of the Seven Deadly Sins and the figure of the Grim Reaper) partly qualifies this by suggesting (in contrast to those hedonistic sites, the Eternal Gardens of Pleasure and Yoshiwara's House of Sin) that any such progress is founded upon an underlying adherence to a more punitive, religious code of self-denial. The ancient catacombs that lie at the deepest level of the underground city can be seen to function, in turn, as the symbolic site for what Fredersen represses, although this character's request for Rotwang to lead him down there does seem symptomatic of a growing need to confront what is otherwise hidden and denied. The possibility of construing this underground burial place as a metaphor for Fredersen's subconscious mind is encouraged in rhetorical terms by the rare shift to a shot taken directly from his point of view as he looks at the plans to this area of the underground city, the image of which then becomes superimposed on one showing the workers actually making their way down to the catacombs. The possibility that what lies symbolically buried in the catacombs is Fredersen's repressed memory of his dead wife is suggested not just by the dead woman's name (as Patalas points out in his voice-over commentary to the 2003 DVD version of the film, 'The Hel of the Nordic sagas/ was the ruler of the underworld,/ motherly Goddess of Death!') but also by Maria's central presence there. The Brigitte Helm character is linked to Hel both by her maternal qualities (having first appeared in the film surrounded by a group of children she is later shown looking after them during the flooding of the workers' city) and by her analogous role as leader of the underworld, a status which in turn enables her, like Hel, to exert a mesmerising hold over men. Maria's association with the dead woman is also suggested by the prominence of various skeletons behind her during the scene in the catacombs when Rotwang pursues and captures her. In view of Rotwang's role as an implied alter ego for Fredersen, it is particularly appropriate that it should be the inventor who, having first deciphered the plans, then leads his 'master' down into the ancient catacombs via a secret passage-way originating in the basement of his old house (where the memorial statue to Hel and the robot recreation of the dead woman both signify a defiant refusal to accept the finality of death).

The possibility that Fredersen may be even more central to the meaning of the film than has generally been thought is given added force when one considers how this character's privileged status as ruler of Metropolis the city invites parallels with Lang's role as director of *Metropolis* the film. It is an analogy that is evoked quite vividly during that moment in the rebellion when Fredersen is shown sitting in his control tower office, looking out over the city through a vast window that approximates in size to a cinema

screen (for another evocation of this window-as-screen metaphor, consider the scene, referred to earlier, when Fredersen is shown closing a large pair of auditorium style curtains by pressing one of the buttons in the control panel on his desk). As the lights from the city's neon signs flicker across the walls, the office suddenly takes on the appearance of a film projection room, the sole inhabitant of which appears in rapt contemplation of a scene he surveys from afar, his privileged position seeming to debar him from participating in a world over which he exerts so much control.

That Fredersen functions as an implied identification figure for Lang is further suggested by the way that this man who wields such authority is continually forced to rely upon various characters (Slim, Rotwang, Maria, Grot) as well as objects (the robot, his office surveillance monitor) to carry out his plans. This parallel is in fact established from the very outset for, in beginning the film so that it coincides with the workers' shift change (having first foregrounded various pistons and wheels moving rhythmically in close-up and the clock hand moving inexorably towards the allotted hour), it is almost as if Lang seeks to regulate the film's textual processes and running time according to the same kind of exacting laws imposed by Fredersen upon his fictional universe.

The kind of centrality that I am attributing to Fredersen here—both as a character in his own right and as a surrogate for Lang—also has implications for Freder's status within the film. For while commentators on *Metropolis* have often tended to regard this character as the film's hero (an approach that necessarily relies heavily upon the explicit, direct modes of subjective narration used to convey Freder's various inner turmoils), there is a sense in which he, too, becomes yet another means of reflecting, indirectly, aspects of the Master of Metropolis's subjectivity. Freder's much stressed role as 'mediator' between 'head' and 'hands' acquires a newfound significance within this context for, in venturing down into this alien underworld (comprising the underground city, the workers' city and the ancient catacombs), it is as if Freder is granting us indirect access to the more suppressed areas of both the paternal and the authorial psyche.

This dual aspect to the underworld is portrayed quite vividly during Freder's initial trips down into the machine-room area. For what he arguably encounters down there, in the first instance, is a world structured in terms of Fredersen's attempt to deal with the death of his wife, with the regulation of the underworld according to a strict regime of work shifts thereby expressing (through this obsessive preoccupation with time) the Master of Metropolis's need to assert a sense of order and purpose that, by implication, he otherwise lacks. The subjection of the workers to such an intolerable regime can likewise be understood as a displacement onto them of Fredersen's emotional anguish at losing his wife and, indeed, of Hel's own suffering and eventual death during childbirth (in the latter case, what the workers are forced to endure, in effect, is an analogous male version of the woman's 'pains of labour').

If one sees Fredersen in part as an implied stand-in for the filmmaker then it is also possible to detect, in the Master of Metropolis's construction of this most mechanistic mise-en-scène, a dramatic (albeit crude and abstract) prefiguration of the more functional style which was to emerge during Lang's Hollywood period. When Freder first sees the workers moving mechanically and collectively to the rhythms of the machines they operate, the figures are framed within separate rectangular units that together make up the overall set, forming a striking visual metaphor for that quality of 'functional precision' which Robin Wood identifies as a characteristic trait of Lang's American films, where: 'As in a perfect machine, every shot, and every detail, gesture, movement

within the shot, has a precise function in relation to the working of the whole' (Wood, 'Fritz Lang: 1936-60' in Richard Roud (ed.), *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary Volume One*, Secker & Warburg, 1980, p.600). The large clock-like dial that dominates the mise-en-scène of the machine room area also symbolises this quality in a Lang film which, as Wood again observes, 'has something of a polished mechanism' about it (ibid.).

Significantly, it is the intrusion by Freder, the Expressionist hero, into the machine-room area that first seems to throw the finely tuned mechanical operations of this alien underworld off balance, the explosion that follows shortly after his arrival eliciting an expressive close-up of one particular worker's fear-stricken face, as he desperately tries to avert the impending disaster, before then prompting a shift to a subjective, dream-like sequence from Freder's point of view. Through his nightmarish vision of the workers being dragged, like slaves, into the open mouth of the god Moloch, it is almost as if Freder seeks to project onto this unfamiliar environment a more recognisable Expressionist perspective. This tension between the Expressionist and functional aspects of *Metropolis*'s visual style perhaps finds its most complex embodiment in the film's portrayal of the workers. For in presenting the latter (both during the early machine-room scenes and the initial shift change) as robotic figures deprived of all meaningful sense of human identity, the film presents us with what is both a highly Expressionist visualization of Fredersen's inner, dehumanised state and a striking image of a group stripped, in stylistic terms, of even the most basic levels of characterisation.

Through the parallels that it develops between Lang and Fredersen as co-architects of *Metropolis*'s fictional world, the film displays a potential for self-critique that finds further expression during Maria's sermon about the Legend of Babel. This is a sequence which, via the implied analogy it offers between architectural and cinematic processes of construction (an analogy that has often been applied by critics to Lang's work as a whole), invites a reading of it as an ironic self-reflection upon the act of filmmaking itself. Maria's sermon about a biblical leader's desire to 'build ... a tower/ whose top may reach/ unto the stars!' even reads, on this allegorical level, as a chastisement of the grandiose ambitions or hubris fuelling the making of *Metropolis* itself. The reference, in one of the intertitles, to 'hands' being hired 'for wages' to build the tower of Babel also seems, when combined with the accompanying shot showing hordes of rope-pulling slaves being drawn from all sides of the frame, to allude to the extravagant scale of the film's own production requirements, the slaves depicted here being performed by part of an overall cast of twenty-six thousand hired extras (see Roger Dadoun, 'Metropolis: Mother-City—iMittleri—Hitler' in *Camera Obscura* No. 15 Fall 1986, p.140). The self-critique inherent in Maria's sermon culminates in the destruction of the biblical tower. For if the final shot of this monolithic, phallic structure lying in ruins seems to serve quite pointedly as a symbolic attack upon Fredersen's control tower (referred to as 'the new Tower of Babel' by Freder earlier in the film), then the latter is a building which, in providing the Master of Metropolis with a privileged but remote vantage point over the city, also embodies an extreme stance of directorial detachment. Much criticised for its sentimental commitment to the power of the 'heart' to overcome social and political divisions, Maria's sermon thus functions more subversively in this context as a warning about the dangers inherent in a form of filmmaking that is too devoid of emotional involvement.

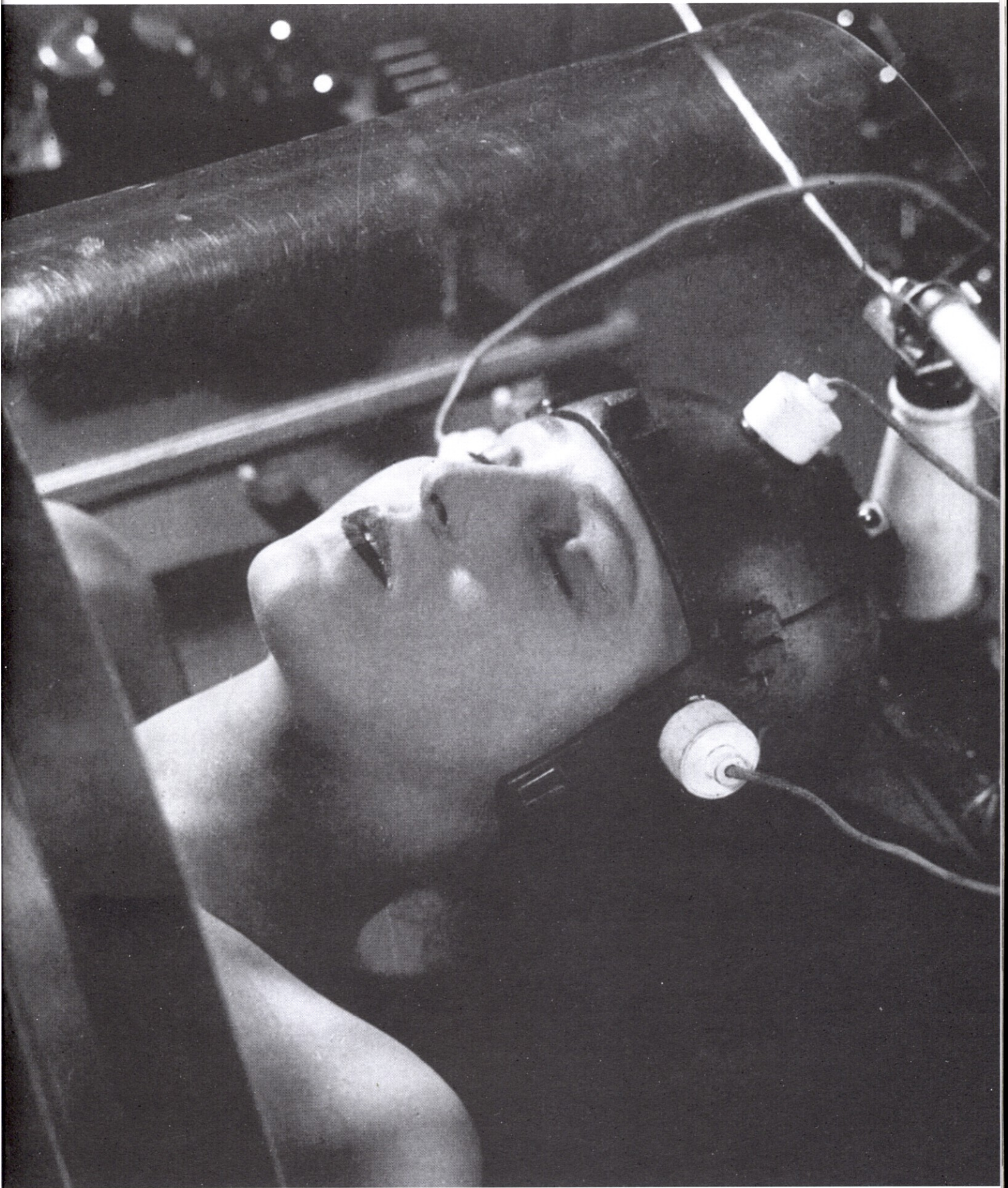
The 'Legend of Babel' sequence also serves a crucial purpose with regard to Fredersen's character since it is upon hearing Maria's appeal to the heart that the Master of Metropolis proceeds

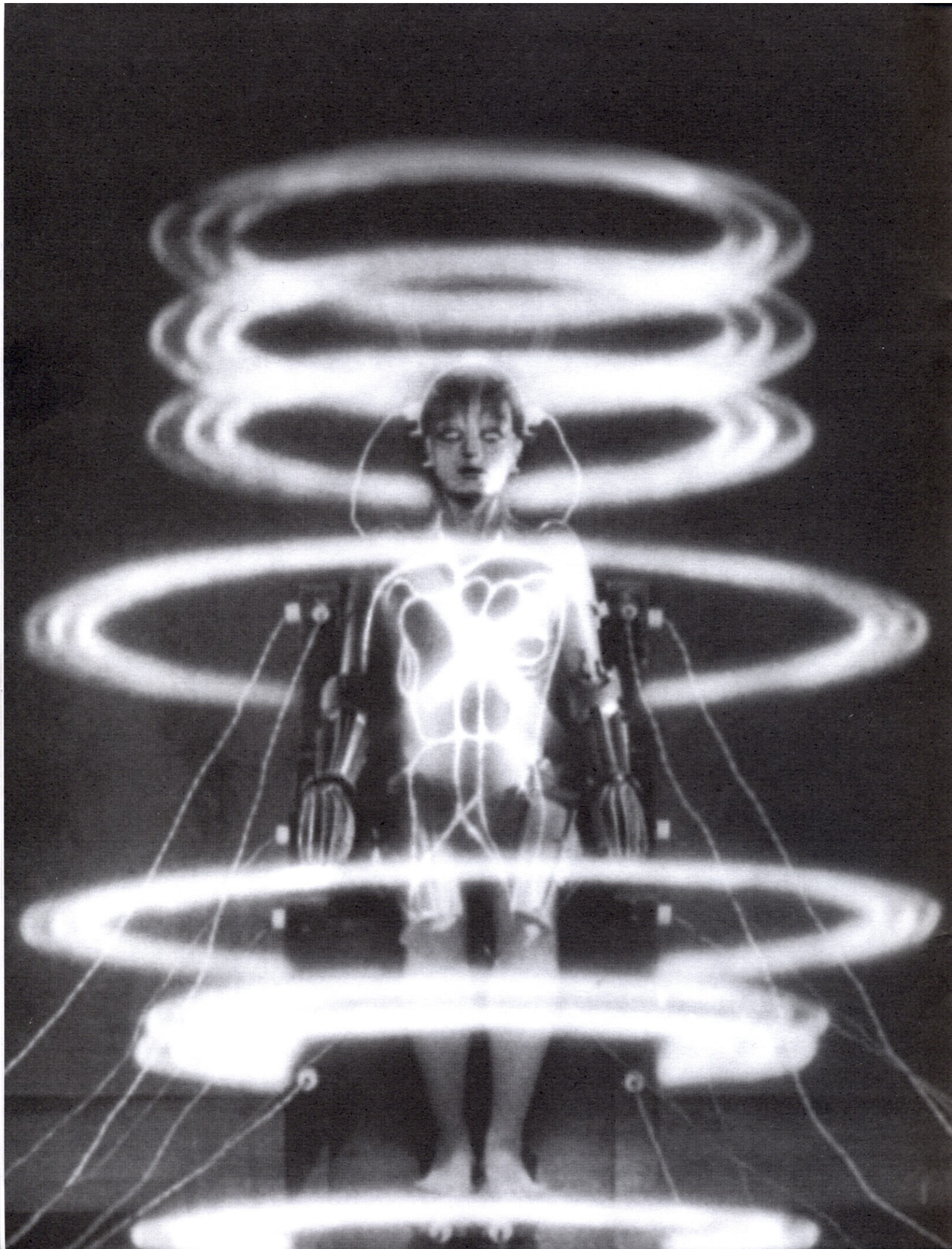
to instruct Rotwang to transform the robot into this female's likeness. While such a plan is overtly explained (in this and other versions) in terms of a political need on Freder's part to regain control over the workers by undermining their confidence in Maria, the earlier restored sequence in fact provides the basis for a quite different reading of his motives here. For given what we know about the robot's role as a stand-in for Hel and Maria's implied links with the latter, Freder's decision to transform this female machine into the likeness of the Brigitte Helm character would seem to point to an emerging desire on his (not just Rotwang's) part to bring the dead woman back to life. (This concern with the male's attempt to reconstruct the image of a dead woman in the form of another is something that, along with the vivid depiction of Freder's fear of falling during the nightmare dream sequence, interestingly links Lang's *Metropolis* with Hitchcock's 1958 film, *Vertigo*.) In view of Freder's (and Rotwang's) implied affinity with the robot during their first encounter, moreover, the Master of Metropolis's decision to give the machine a human form also appears symptomatic of a need to express, albeit indirectly, his own unacknowledged feelings. In both these respects, my reading differs from that offered by Andreas Huyssen who, presumably analysing the scene without the benefit of access to the restored material about Hel, construes Freder's instruction here as a rather reactionary, defensive response to 'his fear of emotion, of affection, of nurturing, i.e., of all that which is said to be embodied in woman, and which is indeed embodied in Maria' (Huyssen, p.73). The alternative possibility that the female robot may serve as an outlet for Freder's repressed emotions helps to explain the otherwise self-destructive consequences arising from his use of the artificial Maria to direct his 'will' over the workers—the full-scale rebellion which she brings about thus construable (in addition to what I argued earlier in relation to Rotwang) as the unconsciously willed return of his disavowed feelings (rather than as simply the result of a political miscalculation on his part). The wink that the robot gives to Freder when receiving his instructions signals her ability to read these more subconscious desires of his: 'I know what you *really* want me to do', it seems to say.

This psychological rationale for the rebellion is further underlined by the fact that the workers' uprising begins deep in the ancient catacombs — a most appropriate site for this eruption of Freder's buried feelings. If the events foregrounded during the rebellion thus function as an unconscious playing-out of some inner drama on Freder's part, then it is particularly significant that the workers should vent their first anger upon Freder for, in doing so, they target the one figure most closely linked to the cause of Hel's death. That Freder harbours an unacknowledged resentment towards his son was hinted at during their very first narrative encounter, when Freder, having burst excitedly into the room to ask his father about the workers, is held at bay by Freder who, keeping his back turned away from his son, holds up his hand in a signalling gesture that instructs the younger male to wait. The coldness of Freder's welcome here (displaying an emotional reticence which crucially *precedes* his discovery of Freder's political sympathies for the workers) is accentuated by the contrastingly warm reception given to Freder by Josaphat (Theodor Loos), the sight of which seems to elicit an expression of surprise from the father himself. Josaphat's friendliness towards Freder provides another possible motive for Freder's subsequent dismissal of this servant from his employment, the callousness of such an action (again carried out with the Master of Metropolis's back to the character concerned) arguably being prompted by a desire to punish Josaphat not only for his implied political betrayal but also for his ability to relate emotionally to the son in a way that the father himself cannot.

Within this context, the workers' murderous assault upon Freder can be read as a symbolic attack by the father upon the son, although if this is the case then it is one that is swiftly disavowed through a process of displacement onto the figure of Georgy (Erwin Biswanger): by standing in front of Freder to defend him, it is this character who is forced to bear the full brunt of the knife originally intended for the Master of Metropolis's son. Georgy's role as the latter's psychic double was established during the earlier scene at the Paternoster machine when Freder was shown exchanging places with this exhausted work-







er (in the Moroder version, Freder is even attributed with the words: 'Let us trade our clothes and *identities*' (my italics)). It is a swapping of roles that serves, in that particular instance, to subject Freder to his father's harsh treatment of the workers at first hand, the experience of which forces him at one point to cry out, in words reminiscent of the crucified Christ, 'Father! Father! Will ten hours never end?!'. The rebellion's symbolic function of unleashing Fredersen's powerful, otherwise unacknowledged feelings of resentment towards his son is also suggested by the fact that the workers, in flooding their underground city, principally endanger the lives of their own children. The workers' corresponding psychic role as a collective representative of Fredersen's id thus lends greater credibility and coherence to the film's otherwise ideologically contentious depiction of them as an irrational, easily duped mob. The possibility that Fredersen is complicit in the workers' act of flooding the underground city (an action that endangers not only the lives of their children but also that of his own son) appears to be particularly likely during that sequence in the 2003 DVD version when, 'as 'The mob storms the M-Machine/ and rushes toward the Heart Machine,/ the power house of Metropolis', Fredersen is shown insisting on the gates being reopened despite the foreman Grot (Heinrich George)'s warning that: "If the Heart Machine is/ destroyed, the entire machine/ district will end up in ruins."

That the flooding also manages to dramatise the release of more positive feelings on Fredersen's part towards his son is suggested by the way that both versions of the film cut at one point from various shots depicting the underground chaos (including one showing water bursting forth from all sides) to a sequence showing the Master of Metropolis's growing realisation of the damage caused by the workers' rebellion. This culminates in the servant Slim (Fritz Rasp)'s announcement that Fredersen's son is also underground 'among the workers!', the news of which provokes in the Alfred Abel character a rare Expressionist style display of overwrought feeling. In also enacting a more general welling up of previously suppressed grief—the force of which, in flooding the city's main power station (aptly named the 'Heart Machine'), threatens to undermine the very foundations of the Master of Metropolis's rule—this emotional outpouring in turn provides the basis for working through a sense of ambivalence on Fredersen's part towards his dead wife that was first hinted at during his initial reaction to the robot.

This ambivalence is reflected in the very different narrative treatment accorded to the two Marias during the flooding: hence, the shots showing the real Maria re-enacting Hel's role as self-sacrificial, 'good' mother (in risking her life to save the workers' children from drowning) are countered by those depicting the workers' capture and burning of the 'bad' Maria (in revenge for her betrayal of their children). That this disturbing outburst of misogyny by the workers functions on this level as a symbolic attack upon Fredersen's dead wife is suggested by the way that, as the flames surround the false Maria as she stands tied to the stake, her outer visage dissolves to reveal her original identity as robot stand-in for Hel. On this level, then, the workers' punishment of the robot-Maria can be read, quite persuasively, as a displaced expression of Fredersen's anger towards Hel for the devastation inflicted upon *his* family life by her death (the meaning of the latter therefore being reconstrued here as an act of maternal desertion rather than self-sacrifice). However, in view of the workers' complicity in the endangering of their children (having blatantly disregarded their offspring's safety during the attack on the machinery), this blaming of the 'bad' Maria may indicate a desire on Fredersen's part to relieve his own sense of guilt over his emotional neglect of his son. The workers' action here is doubly repressive: in burning

the false Maria, they not only enact a displaced attack upon Hel but also, in returning the robot to its former mechanical state, bring about a symbolic killing off of Fredersen's recently resurfaced emotional side.

The destruction of the robot is followed by its inventor's death, with Rotwang's fall from the cathedral roof (following his pursuit of the real Maria, having mistaken her for Hel, and his struggle with Freder) serving to release Fredersen from this excessive, pathological embodiment of his unacknowledged desires. Fredersen's downcast manner and drooping bodily posture at the end of this sequence convey a sense of psychic depletion on his part after he has witnessed the loss of this *alter ego*. But the preceding shots, showing him kneeling with his hands on either side of his head, an expression of emotional intensity clearly evident on his face as he watches the struggle, do imply that some form of inner synthesis or resolution has been achieved. And it is a form of resolution that, in offering an alternative, more private working through of the film's central idea about the heart needing to act as mediator between head and hands, also seems to provide a crucial foreshadowing of *Metropolis*'s much debated ending. In a moment that both harks back to and derives its meaning from the restored sequence about Hel, Fredersen's tentative handshake on the cathedral steps with Grot, the foreman, in turn plays out, via this by now characteristic displacement onto the film's political arena, what had earlier gone unfulfilled during the Master of Metropolis's first encounter with Rotwang's robot reconstruction of the dead woman. The difficulties inherent in mediating complex psychological concerns through the film's overt political scenario are encapsulated in the awkward figure of Grot. His inappropriateness as a political representative for the workers here (having earlier been shown acting on Fredersen's behalf during the rebellion) is matched by his correspondingly problematic status as implied representative of the male protagonist's id (when, in fact, his chief role had been to engineer the destruction of Maria the robot and the more positive forces unleashed by her). And it is Grot who, as agent of repression within the narrative, leads the workers in their mechanical march up the cathedral steps, their triangular formation evoking the Freudian triad of the ego, super-ego and id and conveying an ominous sense of psychological forces now locked tightly back in place.

In arriving at this reading of *Metropolis*, it has been necessary to take account of various forms of mediation, all of which seem distinct from, yet nonetheless contingent upon each other. What I have argued, overall, is that the film's dramatisation of the conflict and subsequent reconciliation between capitalist and workers can be construed somewhat differently to existing readings, especially when considered in relation to the possibilities of reflected subjectivity. My analysis has been both enabled and ultimately limited by the partially restored nature of the two versions that I have used, with the 2003 release of the newly restored version of the film on DVD prompting me to both extend and reaffirm but also slightly revise the interpretation that I had first formulated on analysing the Moroder version. In ways that seem curiously analogous to the subject of the reinstated material itself, we are faced with the need to rely on what is, still, only an intermediate, incomplete version of the real thing.

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PLEASURES OF *THE BIG SLEEP*

BY NATHAN HOLMES

Perhaps the most remarked upon aspect of Howard Hawks' 1946 film *The Big Sleep* is its labyrinthine storyline. The oft quoted tale is that it was asked on set one day who was supposed to have killed Owen Taylor, the Sternwood family's chauffeur: neither Faulkner, the scriptwriter at the time, nor Hawks, nor Raymond Chandler, the author of the book upon which the film is based, is said to have known the answer. On one level this is just the sort of trivia—the sort that is brought up impishly in interviews or placed in little nuggets on the back of DVD reissues—that seems to pass these days for Hollywood “lore.” On a distinctly different level, however, this little anecdote seems to be a very specific way of dealing with the difficulties presented by this film—not just the difficulty of making precise connections between characters or between the cause and effect of events but the difficulty of watching a film which seems to make few concessions to the reasoning spectator while being at the same time—to the same reasoning spectator—so pleasurable to watch.



It is perhaps the case for some that *The Big Sleep* frustrates more than it pleases. But it is a common misconception that there are questions left unresolved at the end of the film. Owen Taylor's murderer is in fact named, as is Arthur Geiger's and Sean Regan's. Knowing these facts does not in itself provide resolution however—at least not the sort of resolution that we commonly expect from popular cinema. By the end of the film Philip Marlowe (Bogart) and Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) are together and, for the time being, questions have been dealt with and danger has subsided. But if we accept that narratives and stories generally take us through observations in order to go somewhere, where exactly have we gone?

The Big Sleep provides a singular cinematic experience, one which is both familiar and very strange. It is familiar because we see recognizable figures (a private investigator [Bogart] and a rich young woman [Bacall]) moving within a mise-en-scene established by commonly understood cinematic codes (medium, eye-level shots and shot-reverse shots for conversations) and taken into interiors and exteriors set at Warner Bros. studios. Even the story—which, it seems, is the problematic object to be reckoned with here—moves forward in a logical enough fashion: things happen for specific reasons and cause other things to happen. As Annette Kuhn writes, “a



close study of the plot of the film shows that the renowned confusion may well be more apparent than real: or rather that it may reside in a relation of reader and text more than solely within the internal dynamic of the text" (4). Our confusion then, might be said to stem from a cinematic encounter that fails to provide the embrace to which we've become accustomed in popular narratives: the familiar rhythms and the facile expositions that guide us through our pleasurable excursions. It is here, though, that the story itself is roughly equivalent to the atmosphere in which these scenes take place. The darkness and cynicism which seems to inflect the film—through both tone and dialogue—produces a sort of nightmarish quality and is refracted into a storyline wherein moving forward is not necessarily progression and where questions increase exponentially even as their answers seem to draw closer.

In what follows, I would like to address these ideas more closely and meditate on what it might mean for a film to adopt a narrative structure that resists an immediate coherence. While it is true that viewers may resolve confusions stemming from the story by retracing their way through it, to do so is not necessarily to *watch* the film anymore. As Leigh Brackett, one of the film's primary scriptwriters, has commented on Chandler's book: "It's a confusing

book if you sit down and tear it apart. When you read it from page to page it moves so beautifully that you don't care, but if you start tearing it apart to see what makes it tick it becomes unglued" (McCarthy 381).

Difficult to ignore when considering this film are the conditions of its production and the series of events that led to the print released in 1946. While the film had already been completed, it was held back—according to UCLA archivist Robert Gitt (in a documentary which accompanies the DVD reissue)—due to a push to get war-themed films into exhibition before their topicality dwindled. During this time, *Confidential Agent* (Shumlin, 1945), starring Bacall and Charles Boyer and in production at the same time as *The Big Sleep*, was released and received very poor notices. Charles Feldman, Bacall's agent, backed by Hawks (McCarthy, 393), wrote a letter to Jack Warner advising him to include more scenes between Marlowe and Vivian reminiscent of those in *To Have and Have Not*, the film in which Bacall had debuted and established a commercially successful chemistry with Bogart¹. Warner concurred. Several new scenes were shot and inserted. Sacrificed to include these additions is a scene in the D.A.'s office wherein the events that have occurred in the plot thus far are delineated and Marlowe's new plan of

Trying to turn it into a
Lynch Film.

action—to more fully understand the connection of these events, and of Eddie Mars (John Ridgley), to the disappearance of Sean Regan—is outlined.

It would be disingenuous to frame the changes made to the 1945 version of the film as a strictly commercial decision, however. Sacrificing narrative coherence for the sake of developing a screen relationship would seem to be by no means a sure bet, but it was highly probable, given the success of *To Have and Have Not*, that the strategy would pay off. Yet enhancing the screen relationship between Bogart and Bacall while at the same time removing key expositional scenes is not just a straightforward exchange, as many commentators seem to think. Completely altered are the terms and the terrain upon which this relationship occurs. Lacking a clear trajectory, the relationship assumes the transitory, interrupted nature that marks many of Hawks' films, such as *Only Angels Have Wings* and *Bringing Up Baby*. Here, as in those films, the heterosexual union is prevented by external circumstances and pressing issues at hand. Yet unlike these films, where a mission has to be flown or a tiger to be found, *just what needs to be done* is abstracted. Instead, Marlowe moves, somewhat circuitously, through the nightworld of Los Angeles, encountering characters and clues that provide new or additional avenues of inquiry. What begins as a blackmail case opens into a murder (of Arthur Geiger), the suggestion of a pornography ring, an additional blackmail case (with photos involving Carmen Sternwood/Martha Vickers) and two more murders (Owen Taylor and Joe Brody/Louis Jean Heydt). All the while, more characters are introduced, the exact connections between them more or less inaccessibly submerged in the deepening storyline. Rather than attempting to plumb the narrative depth of *The Big Sleep*, I would like to traverse its more beautiful narrative surface, paying careful attention to what the film *shows* rather than what it doesn't. This is not to dispense with the plot of the film altogether, but to conceive of it less as a determining structure and more as a method of conveyance. Flitting across the surface of the narrative are the playful and charged exchanges between Marlowe and Vivian.

The point here is to read these exchanges not as alterations to or decorations of the narrative, but as a way of re-conceiving the purpose of narrative itself. That Marlowe and Vivian are continually brought together through the machinations of the plot is true. Also true is that in being together, Marlowe and Vivian *exceed* the plot at the same time as being entangled within it. In Marlowe's office, Vivian places a call to the police for a specific reason (to prove to Marlowe that she isn't scared to). The call, however, precipitates Marlowe's intervention and ends with Vivian collaborating to convince the police that *they* placed the call. Like earlier scenes between them, this sequence establishes—quite charmingly—that Vivian and Marlowe can dance together in time if they choose to. Offered here is a moment with no relation to the advancement of plot. Although not altogether severed from the demands of plot progression, these characters, it seems, are afforded—for a moment—the dignity of *being*.

How else might we read the scene in the Acme bookstore where a flirtatious interaction leads to an (implied) afternoon tryst between Marlowe and the proprietress (Dorothy Malone)? Free from this scene is any notion of sexual conquest or any sort of embarrassing eagerness to establish Marlowe's heterosexual desire or potency. Instead, both parties are clearly sexual agents, both acting and acted upon. Leaving the bookstore, the proprietress urges Marlowe to return if he's ever again looking for a "Ben-Hur 1860." Marlowe's disarming retort is a friendly, "So long, pal." Hawks allows this scene to stand on its own, simply a moment in the day of both Marlowe and the bookseller.

In contrast to the protagonists in films like *Only Angels Have*



Wings and *Bringing Up Baby* however, it is Marlowe himself in *The Big Sleep* who is the agent of interruption, questioning Vivian's attempts to "sugar him off" the case just as things between them seem to be acquiring a certain momentum (after a suggestive discussion about horse racing and "saddles"), and kissing her only to follow up with probing questions about Eddie Mars. The scene in the car where Marlowe admits to Vivian he is attracted to her, kisses her, and then reveals that he knows that she and Eddie have just attempted to deceive him is, perhaps, one of the most complex scenes in the film. It precariously balances what has previously been held separate: Marlowe's desire for Vivian and his desire to figure out Eddie Mars's connection to the events so far.

As Robin Wood has pointed out, what differentiates *The Big Sleep* from other filmic adaptations of Chandler's work is that the film does not expressionistically present Marlowe's subjective vision of the world he encounters, "we are not forced to see *as he sees*" (169). Indeed, in contrast to the classical detective whose self is obliterated and invisible so that he may become nothing but an inspecting eye, a pure and rational gaze at the world, Hawks's/Bogart's Marlowe is one who is clearly in and of the world that is presented. For this reason, Marlowe is subject to the ephemeral enchantments of neighborhood booksellers and cabdrivers. So too is he unable to see



or piece this world into any sort of coherent whole. The clues he accumulates are not pieces in a grand puzzle to be disclosed at the film's end (as in, say, a Sherlock Holmes mystery), but a way of moving from one moment to the next. Often it is not even "clues" which engage this movement, but new characters to be followed or dealt with.

Marlowe moves from moment to moment and place to place, not piecing clues into an elaborate system that can be sketched out for all to see in the end, but instead tracing out an arbitrary direction in which to point himself. In the first half of the film he moves from the Sternwood house to a bookstore and then on to a cottage. Happening on this cottage at just the right time, he witnesses the aftermath of a murderous conflict that precipitates another murder and another attempted blackmail. That Marlowe has the capacity to move in this way through this complex plot is due not so much to his faculty for ratiocination as to his ability to redirect energies of power and knowledge at an opportune time. Take, for one example, his intrusion into Joe Brody's apartment. On the basis of limited information, Marlowe convinces Brody that his attempt to blackmail Vivian Sternwood with compromising photographs makes him a suspect in a murder; Brody resigns to this and hands over the negatives (shortly thereafter being shot by Carl Lundgren [Tommy

Rafferty]). Or: in the conclusion of the film Marlowe forces Eddie Mars to expose himself as Sean Regan's killer and flee—in a last ditch attempt to save himself—from the house into a hail of bullets from gunmen in his own employ. That Marlowe has momentary knowledge or momentary power does not mean he has knowledge or power more generally. In fact, he is often dumbfounded. He never finds the answer to the question that he continually aims at Vivian: "What does Eddie Mars have on you?" Indeed, the answer to this question, given the depravity and violence that has already been glimpsed throughout the film, might well be anti-climactic. More important to Marlowe than Eddie's real knowledge is that Eddie has *something* on Vivian and that to release her he must be deposed. As a token gesture towards the genre this film is supposed to inhabit, it is revealed that Mars himself is Sean Regan's killer, thus resolving the thread that animates the film's second half.

"The notion of character is always secondary," writes Roland Barthes in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," "entirely subsidiary to the notion of action: there may be actions without 'characters', says Aristotle, but not characters without an action" (104). Going further than this, Structuralist analysis (such as that found in the work of Vladimir Propp and A.J. Greimas) holds that characters—or "actors", "*actants*"—are subordinate to the

movement of narrative, performing certain functions in line with a psychological and historical classification established through a commonly understood "type" (i.e. through costume, disposition etc.). Fascinating about *The Big Sleep* however, is that it seems to be an experiment designed to test the limits of this hypothesis. In that the movement of the narrative is apparent but also in many ways opaque, the characters are brought to the fore, with no clear relation or recourse to an ultimate function (i.e. the end of the story).

The motivation for the various characters is perhaps clearer in Chandler's book, often described as his most "anti-rich" novel. Looking to the passage wherein Marlowe describes his initial thoughts about the Sternwood house seems to provide evidence of this:

I stood on a step breathing my cigarette smoke and looking down a succession of terraces with flowerbeds and trimmed trees to the high iron fence with gilt spears that hemmed in the estate. A winding driveway dropped down between retaining walls to the open iron gates. Beyond the fence the hill sloped for several miles. On this lower level faint and far off I could just barely see some of the old wooden derricks of the oilfield from which the Sternwoods had made their money... A little of it was still producing in groups of wells pumping five or six barrels a day. The Sternwoods, having moved up the hill, could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could look out their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to.

At the center of this film—never explicit, but always implied—is the Sternwood's wealth. It is the hope of people like Arthur Gieger (Theodore von Eltz), Joe Brody, Harry Jones (Elisha Cook Jr.) and Agnes Lowzier (Sonia Darrin) that a portion of this wealth might be extracted in exchange for preservation of the Sternwood's ever-tenuous public image. Marlowe, while interested in receiving payment for his services, is not ultimately bound to the desire for money or even to his contractual obligations to General Sternwood. When Marlowe acts on and within his environment he acts not out of naked self-interest but out of helpless entanglement, erotic attachment to, and love for, the world in which he lives.

Take, for example, the appearance of Harry Jones, Marlowe's "shadow." Emerging from the foggy street just outside Marlowe's office, Jones offers Marlowe, still smarting from being attacked by Mars's goons, information about the whereabouts of Sean Regan. Accepting this offer, Marlowe agrees to pay him for the information, which is held by Agnes, formerly Joe Brody's partner. Marlowe arrives at the office to find that one of Mars's men, Canino (Bob Steele), has already reached Jones and is questioning him about his reason for tailing Marlowe. Canino coerces Jones into disclosing Agnes's location and then poisons him. Reducing the two main sequences involving Jones to mere narrative function would obscure the fact that, in this short amount of time, he is able to achieve more than just what might be called narrative agency. Calling the address Jones has given to Canino in order to warn Agnes, Marlowe learns that Jones has lied about the address, thereby saving Agnes from his fate. As Marlowe realizes this, he is shown in close-up, a barely discernible smile crossing his face. On the phone with Agnes, Marlowe tells her, "Your little man died to keep you out of trouble" and later on in the car, "Let's put it down that your little man deserves something better." Marlowe recognizes—and we watch him recognize—Jones as a fully formed figure, someone who has intelligently negotiated this underworld in order to momentarily re-direct energies (here in the form of an exchange of

money for valuable information) for his own, and Agnes's, benefit. For Marlowe, Jones represents a glimpse at something beyond naked self-interest. This little man deserves better because he acted out of love.

If this scene, which has little to do with the actual outcome of events (it merely allows Marlowe to locate Eddie Mars's wife, a narrative task that might have been accomplished much more efficiently), resembles a form of "truth" then we see again that truth is evanescent. This is the case in the bookstore, in Joe Brody's apartment, with Vivian on the phone to the police, and in the offices of the Waldgreen Insurance. As Hawks has declared about the evolution of his filmmaking style, "I'm learning more about characters and how to let them handle the plot, rather than let the plot move them" (McCarthy, 381). In *The Big Sleep*, I would argue, this technique is elevated to a philosophy. The plot is still obviously carrying the characters here, but they are never subordinated to it. If this were the case, the scenes I have outlined here would never have occurred. Nowhere is this philosophy clearer than in the end of the film when Marlowe confronts Eddie Mars in Geiger's cottage.

That Eddie Mars should end up to be Regan's killer is, of course, convenient to the Vivian/Marlowe relationship and, to some degree, gives purpose to Marlowe's efforts in the second half of the film. Aside from these things, however, this ending is completely arbitrary. It is, above all, *an* ending but by no means *the* ending. As discussed above, because Marlowe exists in the world that he at the same time attempts to unravel, he can only ever uncover temporary truths. This is primarily because, as a detective he both perceives things *and* experiences them. The murkiness of the narrative is not just an enigma to be plotted and eventually held up for scrutiny, but an essence that must be necessarily moved through.

Conventional to popular film—an indeed many other forms of narrative—is the notion that to move from the beginning of a narrative to an end is to go on a sort of quest. At the beginning of the film/story, direction is uncertain and possibilities are open. At the end of the film possibilities have been narrowed and closed off and what is left for consideration is something like an ultimate truth: tragedy, marriage, a lesson learned and so on. Yet in *The Big Sleep* it seems that possibilities are being continually opened up, not closed down, and that the path of the narrative is something to be wandered from, not strictly adhered to. Many of the important, memorable and wonderful things in this film—indeed the best things about this film—are such wandering. Marlowe acknowledges that what he does is "other people's dirty laundry." In doing so he acknowledges that he is unable to determine the path that he is set on, what he might be asked to do, or where he might end up. Recognized by Hawks here, and shown through Marlowe and Vivian, is that life is found not in grand designs but in the tender moments of respite when these designs seem to fall away.

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Notes

1 This letter is reproduced and read in its entirety by Robert Gitt in the DVD release.

THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD

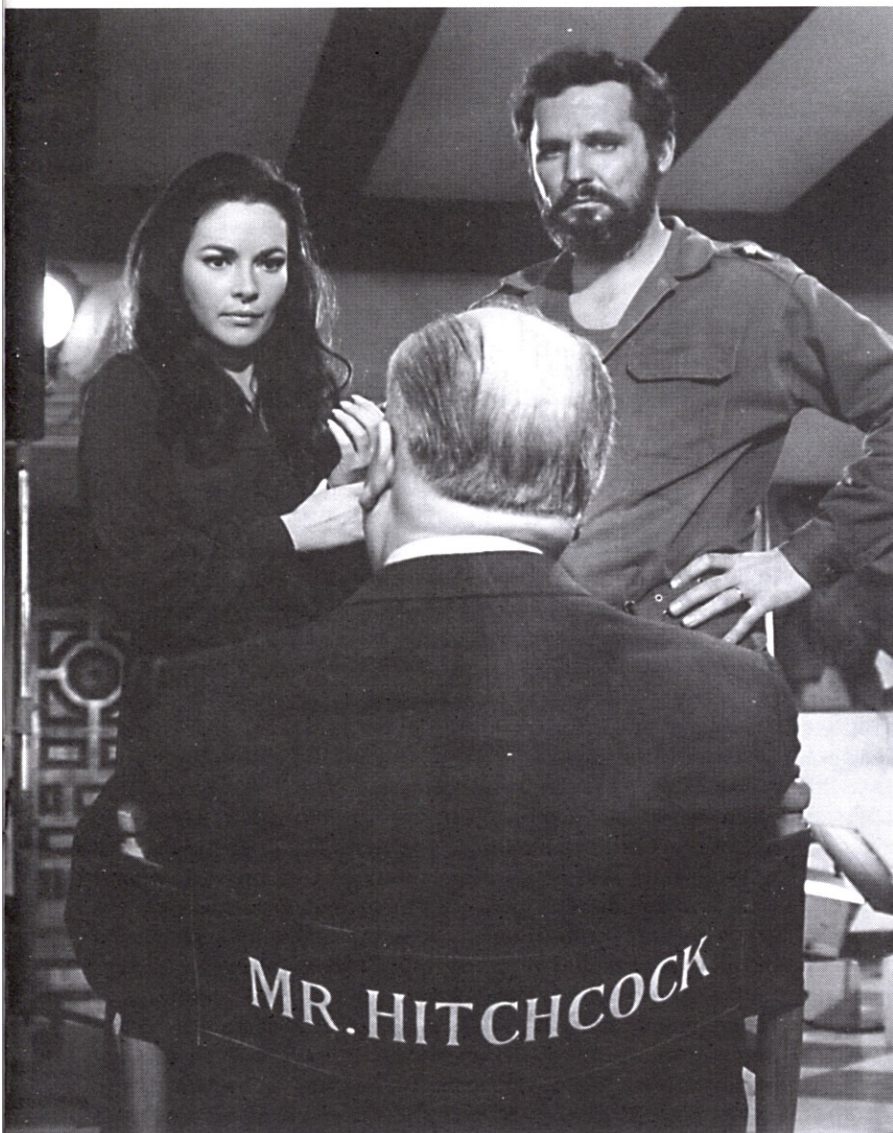
Betrayals in Alfred Hitchcock's *Topaz*

BY JUSTIN E.A. BUSCH

Topaz, Alfred Hitchcock's antepenultimate film, has received minimal attention from either audiences or critics, most of it dismissive. Dan Auiler describes it as "a disaster in any terms," for example, while Raymond Bellour simply dismisses the film as "heavy" and "awkward."¹ While there can be little doubt that both the pace of the film and its use of conventional suspense elements are subdued, especially by comparison with Hitchcock's earlier political thrillers, there also can be little doubt that this is largely a matter of choice on Hitchcock's part; *Topaz* is not, as were those films, primarily a study of an individual caught up in, but ultimately escaping, the coils of power politics, but rather an examination of the corruptions spreading out from political power itself. In his previous political films, Hitchcock concentrated primarily on the innocent or near inno-

cent person (Alicia Huberman, Manny Balestrero, Roger Thornhill, and so on) used, intentionally or otherwise, as a part of the machinations of political movers and shakers. In *Topaz*, he concentrates instead on the agents of power, the people who must make use of, and accept the consequences for, those innocents. *Topaz* thus develops two themes common to many of Hitchcock's films—the distrust of authority and an ambivalence concerning the effects of power on those who wield it—but from a different angle than before. Here, power itself is seen as a corrosive which eats away not merely at those within its grasp but at those who employ it. Power, whether used for good or ill, exists to preserve itself, and thus exists amorally. Wielders of power, on the other hand, exist always within a moral universe, such that they are inevitably corrupted, crippled, or destroyed by what they use and serve. It is this bleak message which provides the foundation for *Topaz*, and which no doubt helped contribute to its poor reception.

In what follows, I will examine some of the subtle and powerful ways in which Hitchcock has explored these themes, and in the process argue that, far from being an awkward disaster, *Topaz*, properly understood, deserves considerably more respect than it has hitherto enjoyed. *Topaz* operates, as befits its subject, on several sequential yet overlapping levels; to take any one of these levels as that of the film as a whole is to misrepresent (in effect to betray) the overall concept and structure of the film. What makes *Topaz* so unsettling, and so easily misunderstood and unfairly criticized, is precisely that it has no moral center. *Topaz* inverts the situation found, for example, in *The Birds*.





Dubois (Roscoe Lee Brown) infiltrates the Cuban Embassy; right, Rico Parra (John Veruon).

In the latter film we have action without authority; here we have *too much* authority, too many centers of moral sanction, each critiquing and canceling out the others, whether implicitly (by virtue of existing at all) or explicitly (through torture, execution, and murders).

If *Topaz* has a problem, it is in part that the film is too short to do full justice to its own vision. One of the few well-known aspects of *Topaz* is the fact that its previews were disastrous, and Hitchcock ended up filming no fewer than three separate endings as he groped for a satisfactory conclusion. His instincts as a moral storyteller led him to seek narrative closure ("Every story has an end," as an intertitle in *The Lodger* tells us), but the interlocking stories in *Topaz*, emblematic of a darker reality than Hitchcock had hitherto explored in depth, do not, and can not, have an end until the systems which sustain them (competitive national interests) have themselves been brought to an end. The international scope and casting of *Topaz* point in the right direction, but for the moment all they can do is point. The "end of *Topaz*" proclaimed by André Devereaux is an interruption, not a conclusion. Given the conventions of the spy thriller, of which *Topaz* is ostensibly an example, such an inconclusive resolution can only be disturbing and, in one

sense at least, dissatisfactory. But this very dissatisfaction, seen from the perspective the film itself demands, is aesthetically, intellectually, and morally more profoundly satisfactory than a conventional 'happy ending' would be.

1. Escape

The film opens with blatant images of brute political strength (a Soviet military parade), accompanied by the blare of a stirring march.² Under the credits we see shot after shot of machines and mechanized men dedicated entirely to destruction. The image freezes, and an intertitle informs us that a "high Russian official who disagrees with his government's display of force and what it threatens" has decided to defect. Thus even before the action has begun we have the first of many betrayals, that of the high Russian official, whose name, we will eventually learn, is Boris Kusenov.

The scene shifts to Copenhagen, but the music continues as before, fading under the street noises, as if to remind us of the omnipresence of the Soviet spy system. Kusenov and his wife and daughter leave the Soviet embassy, and are followed by three agents into the city center; only there does the march subside at last, buried under the ambient city sounds. During this entire



Dubois escapes.

opening sequence few words are heard; indeed, numerous times in the film Hitchcock deliberately withholds the spoken word, as if to emphasize the surreptitious (and even unspeakable) nature of the various actions. Apart from this, though, there is little to indicate that the film will not be a conventional escape thriller, with the Soviets attempting to prevent the suspected defection and someone, presumably the Americans, looking to aid it. Hitchcock builds tension slowly as the three defectors begin a tour of a porcelain factory, accompanied by the agents they had thought to lose. The daughter separates from her parents and passes into the showroom, where she deliberately breaks a figurine.³ Apologizing to the company representative who has witnessed the 'accident,' she escapes her follower for the few moments needed to contact the American embassy and Michael Nordstrom, the lead player on the American side. He tells her what to do, and within twenty-four hours (and only a few minutes of screen time) the Russians are in the United States, taking up residence in a safe house near Washington. Clearly we have been misled, both by the set-up and by the slow yet tense manner in which Hitchcock has filmed the maneuverings of the Kusenovs and their pursuers; *Topaz* is about something more than a political defection.

2. Information

The scene shifts to what is presumably the French embassy, where a second betrayal becomes clear, as we learn that the French agent André Devereaux has "built up the best intelligence organization in the Western hemisphere," in large part through contacts with, and for the purposes of spying upon, the Americans, diplomatic hosts of the French. Devereaux appears and is quizzed as to his ignorance of the recent defection. He, in turn, is intrigued at the fact that someone in Paris already knows, a concern dismissed by his nominal superior, Rene Darcy (whose physical appearance is noticeably similar to that of Kusenov, providing another cue as to the moral interchangeability of the agents, whatever their nominal national loyalties).

Darcy: **How Paris got its information is not our concern. We're being asked to find out where the Americans are hiding the defector and how.**

Devereaux: **Why?**

Darcy: **Huh?**

Devereaux: **What will Paris do once we have found out? Pass**

the information back on to Moscow?

Darcy: André—

Devereaux: And so two men will arrive to liquidate him?

Devereaux, having noted the likely result of his investigations, nonetheless accepts the assignment; his function is to gather information, not to pass judgement on its eventual use.

Although it is not yet clear, all of the thematic elements of *Topaz* are now in place. Each of the central characters, and several of the peripheral ones, will engage in some form of manipulation of someone else, some form of deceit. From these first betrayals, almost innocuous on their surfaces, the others follow as the web of personal relationships disintegrates, lasting only long enough to entangle others. No one is to be trusted universally; the only way to maintain personal integrity is to betray one's political beliefs, or vice versa.

The action returns to the safe house, where Kusenov is being interrogated; in the process he attempts to evade becoming an informer as well as a defector. Asked when he assumed his duties as deputy head of the KGB, he responds "This is of no concern to you." The interrogators are unimpressed. "We would like to be the ones to decide that," one replies, and again Kusenov attempts to assert his own authority. "No," he states, "I will decide." A revealing exchange between Kusenov and McKittrick, the chief American official, follows.

McKittrick: What the hell do you think you're here for?

Kusenov: I asked for sanctuary and protection for myself, my wife, and my child.

McK: And you got it.

Kuz: But I gave you no understanding.

McK: The hell you didn't. You're in this business; you know the score.

Kuz: Still, I gave you no understanding.

McK: Look. The way you're going, you may find yourself on the front steps of the Russian embassy tomorrow.

Kuz: And that would be the end for me. But you would never get another defector.

A momentary stalemate ensues and a new line of questioning begins: "Does the word 'topaz' mean anything to you?" Kusenov replies with a negative, but the sudden high angle shot of his face lets the viewer know that Kusenov is lying; he is still, in some measure, holding to his former political loyalties. In fact, though, he is trapped by his own decision to defect; whatever he does from this point on will be a betrayal of one side or another.

McKittrick's mixed metaphor is entirely appropriate, given the sorts of people involved here. Espionage is both a business and a game to its practitioners. From either perspective, the opponent is someone to be outwitted and defeated, with little thought being given to the consequences for them. Both are intrinsically amoral, with appeals even to rules and regulations being possible only within a larger system (the laws under which a business operates, or the patterns of behavior which allow a particular game to be defined). But here there are no laws, because espionage is international and largely unsupervised and the patterns of behavior are invented in response to particular situations, and therefore exist in a moral vacuum.

The point is driven home inexorably in the sequences which follow. Having invited Nordstrom to dinner with the express intention of pumping him for information, Devereaux returns home; the audience's presumption is that we will now see his more humane side. But this presumption is contradicted almost at once;

his wife Nicole quickly asks "why are we having Mike Nordstrom for dinner?" and is answered with an outright lie. The ensuing scene unfolds awkwardly, in anything but a familial manner. From Nicole's question onward, there is scarcely any eye contact between husband and wife, save when Nicole is implicitly challenging him. The visuals intensify the conflict as Nicole presses the question, clearly unsatisfied with the first lie: "Now, why did you ask Mike Nordstrom to dinner?" Devereaux mixes drinks with his back to her, until she tells him that he "could easily have a job back in the foreign office," at which point he turns at last to face her—but only to ask who said so; it is information, not intimacy, which engages his interest. Nicole rejects his political stance, asserting that France in general, and Devereaux in particular, should remain neutral in the Cold War; "no one is neutral," he replies. As they argue, the couple remains separated by a series of shot/reverse shots, and soon Devereaux's back is turned again. By the time he turns to face her once more, on her line "I don't want you to be killed," it is too late; Nicole has now turned her back and walked away (walking away forms a small but noticeable motif throughout the film).

The very next shot reveals Devereaux and Nicole together at last, but the intimacy is mediated by the third-party presence of Nordstrom. The visual separation continues; as the scene unfolds, virtually every shot is either of Nicole alone or of Devereaux and Nordstrom together. Only at Nicole's mention of the daughter do we get a two-shot of Nicole and Devereaux, the momentary connection further emphasized as Nicole announces the impending holiday in New York City, where they will not "see a single solitary spy." She clings to Devereaux in one of their few moments of genuine warmth, but it doesn't last. Although Nicole professes to like Nordstrom, "for an intelligence man," her move toward him silently acknowledges the power of what he represents, and breaks the connection with Devereaux.⁴ Soon she has left.

These two scenes (and the later ones between Devereaux and Nicole) are vital in establishing a central aspect of *Topaz's* world view: that the very nature of espionage and the international power relations which generate its necessity is such as to destroy, or at least cripple, genuine human relations. In a conventional sense, the relationship between Devereaux and Nicole should be the emotional core of the film, giving the audience two people with whom to side against the external forces which would tear them apart. But this identification is rendered difficult, if not impossible, by the consistent awkwardness of the scenes between them, an awkwardness echoed in the majority of the images, as well as by Dany Robin's French accent and 'foreign' pronunciation; though entirely appropriate to her character, they add to a sense of disconnectedness between Nicole and the largely English-speaking audience for whom the film was intended. The same is even more true of Frederick Stafford's slightly wooden sincerity in all the scenes with Robin; there is no sense of passion, or even of emotional mutuality, between them. This may be at least in part due to Stafford's limited range as an actor, yet whatever the reason it is exactly what is necessary here, for any passion on his side would provide a counterweight to the emotionally drained compromises he has made between his political and his personal commitments. Were he to care greatly about anything, we might be enticed into taking his side, but his coldness keeps us from supporting him, even though he is, objectively, the protagonist.

After Nicole leaves, Nordstrom reveals to Devereaux the information he seeks. "McKittrick says I'm taking a big chance," he comments, but his apparent betrayal of official secrets is immediately matched by Devereaux's implicit agreement to keep the information to himself for the moment, thus betraying

Devereaux's own assignment and his country's putative interests. From this Hitchcock cuts immediately to Kusenov, who is refusing to "betray" his country. "I am sick of these questions," he shouts, "I'm sick of this inquisition." Nordstrom responds bluntly. "You knew what you were in for," he says. "If you had me in Russia and I wouldn't talk, what do you think would happen to me?" As Nordstrom speaks, the opening march reappears, underlining the link between the aims, if not necessarily the methods, of the intelligence communities in the two countries. "All right, here it is," Nordstrom snaps at Kusenov. "You're being asked to tell us the things we must know." In return he offers safety and a new life. But the underlying threat remains palpable; if Kusenov does not cooperate fully, his life and those of his wife and daughter cannot be guaranteed. "And what is the alternative?" Kusenov asks. Nordstrom's shrug as he answers is chilling. It is Kusenov's information, not his life, which matters here; without the former, the latter is irrelevant. The relation between the two men is emphasized by the blocking; Nordstrom turns his back to the camera and walks directly away as he outlines the limited options, turning only to tell Kusenov that after a month, "You're on your own." The music continues as Kusenov capitulates, accompanies him as he returns to the room where his interrogators await, and ends only as the questioning resumes. "I made my bargain with the devil," he admits a few moments later; his betrayal is now all but complete.

Kusenov's surrender solves an immediate problem merely to generate another. The documents concerning Russian involvement in Cuba which the Americans seek do exist, but only in the possession of a high Cuban government official, Rico Parra, and his personal secretary, Luis Uribe. The former is presumably unreachable, and the latter hates Americans. But he can be bought, Kusenov assures his interrogators; he has already done so himself. "I have used him," he comments coldly, adding, as by now we should expect, that "the Cubans don't know". The Soviets may be aiding the Cubans, but this by no means requires that they should be honest with them.

Nordstrom approaches André Devereaux, now on vacation in New York City with his wife, daughter Michele, and son-in-law François Picard, a journalist covering the United Nations.⁵ Again to Nicole's disgust Devereaux agrees to help Nordstrom out. Devereaux leaves his family behind (yet another small betrayal) to meet with one of his own operatives, Dubois, the Martinique-born owner of a flower shop in Harlem.⁶ In turn Dubois, posing as a reporter from *Ebony* magazine (theirs is one of many press cards he carries; his identity is a matter of the needs of the moment), suborns Uribe with money supplied by the Americans. Uribe's betrayal is the greatest yet, for it is both political (he is giving away Cuban government secrets) and personal (he is trusted by Parra).

As before, the presentation echoes the situation. Hitchcock reminds us of the fog in which Devereaux and Dubois are operating by refusing to share all the details of several key dialogue scenes. Devereaux's instructions to Dubois are given inside the refrigerator room in the latter's flower shop; we and the camera remain dispassionately outside, watching but not hearing. More significantly, Dubois's entire interview with Uribe is seen from Devereaux's point-of-view, across a busy street; all we hear are the sounds of passing traffic. Just as the Copenhagen street sounds covered Kusenov's initial betrayal of his country, the Harlem street sounds cover Uribe's. The sole difference is that Uribe's betrayal is detected, and will end in his death. As Dubois photographs the relevant documents in Uribe's room, Parra breaks in and witnesses the betrayal. Dubois promptly escapes without a thought for Uribe, a point emphasized in a macabre fashion when Dubois

returns to his shop and completes a large floral wreath with a purple ribbon on which is printed 'Rest in Peace'. The indifference of Dubois to Uribe's fate echoes that of Nordstrom's regarding Kusenov; what matters in each case is what the person being questioned knows, not their life or death.⁷

3. Investigation

The information obtained by Dubois sends Devereaux to Cuba over the direct objections of his wife, but the process includes yet a further lie and betrayal, as well as another step in the alienation of husband and wife. After an establishing shot, the scene opens with Nicole in the foreground, her back to the camera, and Devereaux's open suitcase on the bed in the background.⁸ As Devereaux packs, Nicole interrogates him regarding his sudden decision to travel to Cuba. For the first few lines both are on-screen, but once Devereaux walks off camera again there is a cut to Nicole; henceforth the shots are alternatively of one or the other, with increasingly tight close-ups of Nicole being answered by unchanging medium shots of Devereaux. Nicole challenges him regarding another woman of whom she has learned; André's response parallels Kusenov's earlier refusal to talk. "I go to Cuba four or five times a year because it is my job. That's all. Now I don't want to talk about it." He doesn't want to talk about it because Nicole's suspicions are true; Juanita De Cordoba is indeed his lover as well as his contact in the Cuban underground. Only after this dismissal do we see husband and wife together, as Devereaux closes and locks his suitcase, but he is now in the foreground with the dismissed Nicole relegated to the background. We have already witnessed the breakdown of communications which nullifies even this tentative visual link, with Nicole vainly trying to find something to say to keep her husband from his assignment/assignment. Throughout the remainder of the scene the compositional balance reinforces the awkwardness; although the two remain together in the frame, Nicole speaks not a single further word, and her husband only a few perfunctory ones. By the time he calls out her name, all he, and we, see is her shadow departing up the stairs.

Once more, what should have been an opportunity to allow the audience to engage emotionally with André Devereaux dissipates in inconclusive and awkward interchanges. To be sure, the acting is not the best in the film, but it is difficult to escape the sense that Hitchcock, both through casting and direction, has achieved precisely what he desired here. The world of international intelligence, as we see again and again, is one in which honest communications between human beings are barely possible, so fraught with hidden meanings is every interaction. Genuinely free people need not play at being who they are, whereas intelligence agents (and deceitful spouses) are constantly playing new roles, roles dictated by their situations, roles which leave them ever more encumbered by fragments of dishonesty which must be reconciled with each other. It is to be expected that relaxed conversations will become increasingly difficult, and that the hidden tensions will sooner or later manifest themselves in visible ways. *Topaz* merely follows Hitchcockian precedents here; the scenes between husband and wife echo, for example, the birthday party in *Young and Innocent*, in which Robert Tisdall cannot remember whether he is 'Beechcroft-Manningtree' or 'Beechtree-Manningcroft', or much of *The Trouble With Harry*, as everyone tries to cover up what never needed covering up in the first place. But in *Topaz* the deceptions between Nicole and André Devereaux add a fresh layer: these deceptions strike at what is often taken to be one of the foundations of human relations: the love of man and woman. Hitchcock has here melded the domestic drama and the thriller so as to highlight the ways in which the political contradictions of society are



The Castro rally (John Vernon, Karin Dor)

mirrored in the lives and emotions of individuals. In a world where trust is simply something to be taken advantage of politically, it is no wonder that the trust without which love cannot exist is so easily abused.

4. Passion

The point is reinforced by the ensuing scenes in Cuba, which are the emotional and political heart of *Topaz*. The loyalties and betrayals underlying much of the first part of the film now take on a sexual component emphasizing the personal devastation which the political commitments of each character entail. The tensions appear at once; André arrives at the home of Juanita De Cordoba only to find Rico Parra just leaving. The two men engage in stilted banter fraught with barely hidden implications,⁹ soon after which André questions Juanita regarding her relations with Rico: "So Rico Parra is still your faithful companion and protector?" Her response, "And my landlord," does not reassure him: "Did he come to, uh, collect the rent?" As he hesitates over the euphemism, his eyes move across her body in a way that makes his meaning clear. She looks away, and disingenuously asks, "How's your wife?" André laughs, and the two kiss and make up.

This odd exchange, seemingly irrelevant, in fact encapsulates the moral sphere within which *Topaz* unfolds; what was implicit

in the strained exchanges between André and Nicole becomes explicit here. Not only is infidelity the norm, any insistence that loyalty is due is simply to be turned aside. What matters is the situation of the moment; any extended purely human relation, free of political concerns, is simply unthinkable. Beyond the needs of the moment, the temptations of the personal must be disavowed, an idea literally thrust in our face by the extreme close-ups, the tightest seen in the entire film (with one exception, to which I shall turn shortly), with which Hitchcock punctuates the following exchange, which veers rapidly from the sensual to the political. The two kiss again, and Juanita tells André that her underground organization is scarcely functioning; there is little he can do but "stay with me for a few days and then go home." Her expression and the tone of her voice indicate that those days will be pleasant ones. "That wouldn't be bad," André says, still in extreme close-up; but he then turns and walks away from the close-up as he announces, unconsciously mimicking both Nordstrom's earlier statement to Kusenov and his movement away from the camera, that "there are things I've got to know." His choice is clear, and never again in the film will such closeness be possible. The point is soon drawn out in even greater detail, as André and Juanita, evidently having already made love, open "our" present, which proves to be mainly a collection of surveil-



Paris: Henri Jarré (Philippe Noiret), François Picard (Michel Subot).

lance equipment; only after Juanita has examined these devices does André give her something personal. Yet this final item, a purse, suggests, through its emptiness, the genuine emptiness at the heart of their apparently loving relationship, a relationship which has developed from, and in its continuation is contingent upon, two betrayals: his of Nicole and hers of her country and Rico.

Despite Juanita's warnings, André insists that her operatives must collect the information he needs, thus setting in motion the catastrophic climax of the Cuban sequence. Another couple, the Mendozas, are equipped with the paraphernalia André has brought, ("our" present turns out to be, in fact, something Juanita herself will never use, so that it remains, in the end, simply a present from André to himself, or perhaps to the Americans). They Mendozas spy on the missile unloading dock, but are betrayed by the seagulls which scoop up the bread which has concealed the camera and alert a keen-eyed soldier. They flee, then attempt to pose as ordinary citizens whose car has broken down on a nearby road, but are betrayed again by the blood trickling down Mrs. Mendoza's arm which reveals her to have been wounded, and are taken in for interrogation.

At the same time André is attending a Castro rally in Havana. There he is spotted in the crowd and identified by one of Rico's

men as having been outside the hotel where Uribe's betrayal took place, and having been 'accidentally' knocked over by the escaping spy. Rico, standing beside Juanita on the official platform, delays André's arrest.

In the scene immediately following, back at Juanita's house, Rico explains why. He arrives unannounced, interrupting a dinner conversation between Juanita and André (visually as well as literally; each shot of the three, from his entrance to his exit, is set up such that Rico is positioned between the other two). Another stilted exchange between André and Rico develops, one in which André and Juanita learn of Uribe's execution and Rico's almost certain knowledge of André's involvement in the events in New York City. "If it were not for her," he tells André, indicating Juanita, "if it were not that it might involve her, you would disappear tonight." His putative reasons are political; "She is a widow of a hero of the Revolution. She is loved and honored in this country." The double reference to love—to the generic feelings of the Cuban populace and to Rico's own emotions (he looks at Juanita on the word 'loved')—is registered in Juanita's shamed look downward in response as the camera, following the turn of Rico's head, cuts from Rico to her. "You are an intelligence agent," Rico continues. "Your association with her could put her in great danger." He orders André to leave in the morning, but not to expect to carry

away any photographs or other evidence. "You will be searched at the airport, completely," he announces, his eyes moving swiftly vertically across André's body on the last word in the same manner as André's had flickered over Juanita's body when quizzing her about Rico. Here, though, the message of possession and jealousy is considerably more menacing, precisely because of the political component now surging to the fore.

Juanita attempts to rally to André's defense, but in so doing indicates her own limited understanding of the triangle of which she is such a vital part. "You're being a damn fool," she tells Rico. "You have made up this story because it's what you want to believe. Because of me." She is right, but only partially; she does not, and given the equivocal nature of André's true relations with her, she cannot understand that neither his nor Rico's commitments are purely personal. Rico loves her, as perhaps does André, but he loves the Revolution as well, as André clearly loves his own work, and in each case the two loves are incompatible, a fact neither Rico nor André yet understands. For the moment all three characters and their respective commitments exist in a precarious balance, a fact indicated by the series of equal close-ups out of which the scene is constructed. It is a balance which will not last.

The next morning André prepares to depart, and we are given a glimpse of the subterfuges intended to foil even Rico's threatened complete search. Juanita gives André a small book as a memento and prepares for a sad farewell; not at the front door, she says, but here in the bedroom, where we are alone, where, implicitly, the private takes precedence over the political. "If things get worse for you here," André tells her, "we'll get you out. I have ways." His sentiments are genuine, as shown not only by the shift from the impersonal intelligence community 'we' to the personal 'I' but by the construction of the close-ups, each of which keeps the other person on the screen. The situation reminds us of another intelligence operative who made political use of a woman for whom he developed personal romantic feelings: Devlin, in *Notorious*. Even the accidental similarity of names, Devlin and Devereaux, fits here, as does the difference; Devlin's name ends, if not decisively, at least in such a way as to require a clear syllabic break to continue, whereas Devereaux's simply dissolves into nothingness. Devereaux is Devlin without even the hope of a genuinely happy ending.

Unlike Alicia Hubermann, Juanita disavows any plan or desire to leave, regardless of what may come. For the moment she is more concerned with André and his upcoming encounter with Cuban security. There is, she admits, another matter; "There is something I have to tell you." She won't reveal it, but she insists that André call her before his plane leaves. Writing, acting, and Maurice Jarré's melancholically saccharine score combine to persuade the viewer that Juanita will at last admit what has been clear all along: her affair with Rico. Certainly this is what André expects as he takes his departure, after a last long sad embrace. Juanita does not watch him leave; she stands and gazes into an unknown distance, her eyes full of tears.

Her tears are misplaced; it is not André for whom she should be weeping. We now see, for the first time since their capture, the Mendozas, about whose fate no one has so much as inquired. Mrs. Mendoza is sitting on a low bench, leaning against a crumbling plaster wall, with her husband draped across her lap; the two are framed by Rico Parra and his chief assistant, Muñoz. Having been tortured by the latter, Mrs. Mendoza will now betray Juanita de Cordoba to Rico Parra. She can barely speak; so weak is her voice that Parra must bring his ear within inches of her mouth to hear. The camera moves in for an extreme close-up, the tightest shot in the film, in a grotesque parody of the whisperings of sweet noth-

ings we have hitherto been denied among the film's various romantic couples; the most intimate moment in the film is one of torture-induced betrayal.

The catastrophe follows swiftly. Parra and a contingent of troops raid Juanita De Cordoba's house. She attempts to keep them from her bedroom (another indication of the tensions between the sexual and the political in her life, as there is in fact nothing politically incriminating to find in her bedroom); failing to do so, she demands that Rico put an end to the search. Standing in the foyer, he gazes up at her. "Come down," he commands in a toneless voice; slowly she descends, with a crane shot from her point-of-view emphasizing both Parra's dominant position and his solitude (the black and white marble squares of the floor subtly suggesting as well the uncompromisable political distinctions which separate the two). At a scream from one of her assistants Juanita starts toward the pantry, only to be seized by Parra, who draws her toward him. As Muñoz and the other men search the house Parra and De Cordoba enter into a personal confrontation which scarcely heeds the existence of the others.

Perhaps the finest scene in the film follows, one in which our sympathies are genuinely torn between the two as individuals, however much we may reject Parra's political stance. "You know some people named Mendoza," he says, a statement as much as a question, to which her affirmative is scarcely necessary. "They have been saying terrible things about you," things Parra gives her every chance to deny. "I do not believe them. Muñoz believes. I can't." But he must; Muñoz enters triumphantly with paraphernalia of espionage found in the hidden room off the pantry, and telephones the airport with explicit instructions on where to search in Devereaux's belongings. Muñoz delivers his lines explosively, almost to the point of caricature, yet the energy of the scene remains with Parra and Juanita (at no point is Muñoz shown in the same shot as Parra and Juanita; the emphasis is on the utter isolation of the pair). Their eyes remain locked; even when Juanita turns her head slightly in response to Muñoz's announcement she does not break her link with Parra. Again the camera stresses the intimacy of the relationship in an almost parodical, yet very serious, manner, as it moves in a very slow curve from Parra to Juanita as the scene plays out. What follows is analogous to what must have passed between the loving Alex Sebastian and Alicia Hubermann had Mrs. Sebastian not stopped Alex from killing Alicia outright.

Parra: So it is true. I have to believe now. The things that you have done against us. Against what we are trying to do. Why?

Juanita: Because you made my country a prison.

P: No. You cannot judge, not you. You shouldn't have done this. To fool me [his kiss of her fingers, held tight in his hands, makes clear that here the political and the sexual are truly inseparable]. To work against me.

J: You'll pardon me.

P: So now we'll have to do to you what we did to the Mendozas, to find out the names of all the others. And all the things that you have done. And we, we will find out. And things—that will be done to your body. This body. [‘This body which I know so intimately, which I have loved’ is the unspoken continuation.]

Parra then shoots Juanita.¹⁰ In a strange and powerful way he has remained loyal to her to the end, saving her from torture in the only way possible. His killing of her is both a betrayal and an act of love; it is a betrayal of her, but also of his beloved Cuba for love

of her, since presumably important counter-espionage information has died with her. Rico's act is the only betrayal of the political order in the film, and it comes from the most overtly political figure.¹¹

There is a grimly ironic coda. The airport calls Muñoz, whose information has proved inaccurate; Devereaux has been released. Parra, standing over the body of Juanita, does not react. A few moments later Devereaux calls for Juanita, only to be told that "Something has happened. She's dead. Shot." As Muñoz speaks Parra leaves wordlessly. In one sense he has triumphed over Devereaux, but at grievous personal cost. The Cuban sequence ends with Parra's jeep leaving Juanita's house, as it had begun, apart from a single establishing shot, with Devereaux's Peugeot arriving. The shift of power is complete, as is the desolation which the exercise of power brings in its wake.

Devereaux, like Parra, recognizes his loss. A brief transitional scene aboard the plane from Havana makes clear his sense of isolation. Even when he realizes that what Juanita meant to tell him was that she had concealed the microfilm in her parting gift, and thus that his mission has, in espionage terms, been a success, his reaction is anything but triumphant. For both Parra and Devereaux, political success means personal failure.

5. Suspicion

For Devereaux, the failure is double; he returns to Washington, where he quickly finds that Nicole has left him, an absence signaled by a jumble of mail partially blocking the door to the entrance hall of his home. He tells Nordstrom, who has noticed the mail, that Nicole "thought she might go to Paris for a while, as long as I was going to be away," (a marvelously ambiguous phrase, given the context) but at this point he is merely guessing. Having lost a lover, he has now evidently lost a wife as well, and, not for the first time, appears to wonder whether anything can be worth this price. The moment is limned with a subtle detail; Devereaux picks up a portion of the mail, a portion consisting mainly of newspapers, then stands, touching what he is holding repeatedly, indecisively wavering as if uncertain of where to go or what to do, before tossing it aside with an almost offhand comment: "the amount of junk mail that accumulates in just a few days." Yet embedded within that 'junk mail', as a brief insert shot has revealed, is a newspaper with the headline "Sea Showdown With Reds Near; Soviet Bloc Orders Combat Alert". Devereaux, having thrown away love, is figuratively tempted to throw away his political commitments as well. With the utmost economy, Hitchcock has signaled the disintegration of Devereaux's home life; the newspaper, with its ominous headline, symbolizes at once the political impediment to Devereaux's return to normalcy and the "junk" which he must somehow discard before he can hope to restore his marriage.

Nor is this all; Devereaux's return is followed almost immediately by a visit from Rene Darcy, who brings a message commanding Devereaux to return at once to Paris and report to the Director-General (in another subtle parallelism, Darcy arrives in a long black limousine, reminiscent of the car in which Kusenov was conveyed to the safe house following his defection). His betrayals of France, whatever they may be (and Darcy explicitly disavows any attempt to learn of them), have attracted attention in the highest circles. Devereaux will, as he tells Nordstrom, be questioned regarding his trip to Cuba, his reasons, his discoveries—and what he has told the Americans. This catches Nordstrom's attention, and he asks Devereaux to meet with Kusenov, who has finally revealed the nature of 'Topaz'.

Seduced by the luxurious life he has been leading since his

defection, Kusenov has at last betrayed those with whom he has worked; he reveals that 'Topaz' is "a code name for a group of French officials in high places who work for the Soviet Union." Even Kusenov does not know the name of the leader, and in fact he reveals only one name: Henri Jarré, a NATO official and an acquaintance of Devereaux's. Nordstrom and McKittrick are concerned lest the Soviets discover how much the Americans know, something which will surely occur should Devereaux reveal what he has learned to the French government. Kusenov recognizes Devereaux's dilemma, and once more draws an explicit connection between their situations. "Monsieur Devereaux," he says, "you are faced with the same problem I had: whether to obey your conscience or to obey your government. Let me give you one piece of advice. Don't go home. These people will give you new life [sic], a new job, everything. Think it over." With an insolent flash of his eyes, he departs for a walk in the woods.

For Devereaux to demand sanctuary from the Americans is the last thing that they want at this juncture. "Well?" Nordstrom demands bluntly immediately upon Kusenov's exit. He and McKittrick stress the importance of keeping Kusenov's information from the French; if Moscow learns what the Americans know, the missiles could be armed almost instantly. The spy ring must be uncovered before the arrival of the American delegation to inform the French government of the plans of the United States in three days. "And I'm supposed to keep my mouth shut and uncover Topaz," Devereaux asks, "at the risk of my own skin?" Nordstrom and McKittrick do not respond to what is clearly a rhetorical question. "That's quite a job, my friends," Devereaux comments dryly.

It appears that the film is shifting in genre focus yet again, becoming something of a mystery story with Devereaux as the detective. An immediate cut establishes that Devereaux has indeed returned to Paris, where he rushes to a cocktail party, thrown by his old friend and fellow Resistance fighter Jacques Granville, at which potential supporters are awaiting his arrival (as is Nicole, but her encounter with her now estranged husband is limited to brief greetings and a farewell which we see but cannot hear). A private lunch meeting is arranged between Devereaux and several of these men, including Jarré. Devereaux observes Jarré's reactions, and fishes to see whether any among the others might know more than they care to mention concerning the Topaz spy ring or its leader, code name Columbine, whose identity even Kusenov did not know, or at least chose not to reveal. Jarré makes a diversionary move, claiming that Kusenov is a double agent planted on the Americans, a possibility which had occurred to no one.

The apparent twist in the mystery, and indeed the mystery element in the narrative, is merely a diversion, though. Both are undercut almost immediately; following the lunch meeting we see a worried Jarré meeting privately with Granville, the man behind Columbine. Granville is less than pleased. He is especially annoyed at Jarré's attempted diversion, a claim easily disconfirmed (his annoyance parallels the audience's annoyance at finding that yet another easily recognizable definition of the film itself has proved false), and unreceptive to Jarré's suggestions that Devereaux may have to be killed; he coldly advises Jarré to remain calm and hustles him out, as he (Granville) has a visitor arriving momentarily, a visitor who passes Jarré as he leaves, a visitor who turns out to be Nicole Devereaux.¹²

The entire scene between Jarré and Granville is rife with symbols and motifs connected with earlier portions of the film. Some are subtle; the yellow and white flowers reappear, and the mirror before which Granville stands as he dismisses Jarré's concerns about "those little hints of possible leaks in the government" that the newspapers are printing clearly represents Granville's duplici-

ty, both toward his nation and his colleague, whom he will shortly have killed.¹³ Some are rather more obvious; the obscenely enormous cigar Granville lights as he speaks with Jarré is a blatant phallic symbol, visually linking with the colossal missiles seen under the names of the principal male players in the credits (and, amusingly enough, an especially large one seen as Director of Photography Jack Hildyard's name appears). Hitchcock plays a small game with smoking and its symbolism throughout the film; those associated with the Soviets (Kusenov, Parra, the Cubans, and Granville) smoke cigars, while those affiliated with the Americans (Nordstrom, Devereaux, and De Cordoba) smoke cigarettes, a fact explicitly noted by Kusenov at one point.

In speaking with Granville, Jarré has mentioned an upcoming interview with a journalist, who turns out to be none other than Devereaux's son-in-law François Picard. The interview is an uncomfortable one, and is interrupted by the arrival of two strangers. Picard calls Devereaux, but the call itself is interrupted, and Devereaux and his daughter, Picard's wife, rush over to Jarré's house, where they find that Jarré has been murdered (the film's final betrayal chronologically, though several others remain to be discovered by the characters themselves). Devereaux and Michele find Jarré's body, but Picard has vanished. The two head back to Picard's apartment, where Nicole is waiting for François and Michele, and where a chagrined Devereaux must admit to Nicole that "He went to do a job for me." Scarcely has Nicole had time to express her pent-up fear about the situation when Picard appears, having been "shot, just a little." Here, if anywhere, is surely room for a reconciliation between Devereaux and Nicole, but Hitchcock withholds his directorial sanction. Even when Nicole clings to her husband when she thinks François has been killed, the embrace is first seen as a close-up of Nicole against his chest, rather than a full two-shot. The medium shot of the two which follows is immediately interrupted by the arrival of François, and we then get a strange echo of the dinner with Mike Nordstrom which initiated Devereaux's involvement. Virtually every shot which follows is either of Nicole and François or of Devereaux alone, or of the three with François positioned between husband and wife. Although Nicole shifts to Devereaux's side of François as François begins to tell what happened to him, this proves meaningless. After a quick close-up of her telling François "you might have been killed," the rest of his story unfolds in a series of alternating shots of François and Devereaux, excluding Nicole completely. Only after Devereaux has rhetorically asked, regarding the Soviet agent whose identity is as yet unknown to him, "who?", does a three-shot allow Nicole to reappear, though only with her daughter and son-in-law. This shot, though, is in fact treating Nicole as a means to an end, as it foreshadows the fact that it is she who already unwittingly has the answer to Devereaux's question. Nicole sees the sketch François drew of Jarré as he interviewed him, and recognizes the man who was leaving Granville's flat as she arrived; this compels her to acknowledge that Granville has betrayed her (and Devereaux), and she reveals what she knows. But she provides the identification, and implicitly confirms what she has done with Granville, to Devereaux with her back turned (thus acknowledging her own betrayal).

The multiple layers of betrayal, personal and political, have now come together, and the film moves swiftly to its conclusion. Nordstrom and the American team arrive in Paris, where Devereaux reveals Granville's duplicity but must also admit that he can prove nothing. Daringly, if not entirely willingly, Hitchcock will diffuse the built-up tension rather than resolve it. The entire exposure of Granville occurs in a single long take. The diplomatic negotiators enter a large room, and Nordstrom indicates Granville

to the chief American ambassador. The camera pulls away and cranes upward as if trying to gain a perspective from which everything will become clear, but a price is paid; the words of the men can be discerned only with great effort if at all. The empty negotiating table dominates the long shot of the room as Nordstrom moves from one group to the other and back again. Then the camera moves slowly in again as one of the French leaders requests that Granville leave; "Look, Jacques; I am very sorry but the Americans would rather that you were not present." He will explain later, he says, but in fact neither he nor Hitchcock will ever reveal just what was said in regard to Granville's duplicity. What matters is the action, not its justification.

The inconclusive nature of the evidence is drawn out explicitly in the coda. Devereaux and Nicole are boarding a plane bound for Washington when they see Granville boarding one bound for Moscow. As Granville bids Devereaux "Bon voyage" the opening march returns, almost obliterating his words; implicitly, the parade of national interests, and the deaths concomitant thereto, goes on. Devereaux smiles wryly and half waves in response. Nicole expresses the outrage appropriate to the situation, outrage which the audience might be expected to share; "How can they let him get away like this?" Devereaux's response reinforces the refusal of the film to grant political catharsis; "I told you, my love, he doesn't miss a trick. They have nothing against him." Casually he dismisses the matter; "Anyway, that's the end of Topaz." But it isn't, quite. Not only are there other agents still at large (Jarré's murderers, for example), but a final shot calls into question the significance of the entire sequence of events. We see a headline proclaiming the end of the missile crisis on a newspaper held by someone whose face and form we never see— but their attention is directed not to the headline but to the back page of the paper. They fold the paper, discard it on a public bench, and walk away, the matter already presumably fading in their mind.¹⁴

6. (In)conclusion

It is perhaps unsurprising that the preview audiences slated *Topaz* so thoroughly. Throughout the film Hitchcock continually betrays the viewer's expectations, such that the film's very nature becomes dubious. Even *Psycho*, with its notorious murder of the presumed central character less than half-way through, had done little to prepare viewers for the kaleidoscopic approach to the story adopted here, or for its inconclusive ending. A narrative which began as an escape thriller, a sort of variation on *Torn Curtain*, turned successively into a political tragedy, a mystery, and then a conventional suspense story, all layered with overtones of domestic drama, before fading out on an irresolute note referring the viewer back to the film's beginning. Given this, any attempt to pigeon-hole *Topaz* is bound to run into difficulties.

But it is precisely this which makes *Topaz* so interesting as a film. More than almost anywhere in Hitchcock's work, and indeed more than in most films by any director, form follows moral function here. Hitchcock is not merely scrutinizing the espionage community, but in some measure allowing us, from within the comfort of a darkened theatre in which no one can see our actions or reactions, to experience the brutal emptiness which lies, and must lie, at the heart of that world. As soon as we sympathize with a single character we are complicit in what we see, for that sympathy, in order to flourish, will lead to, and indeed require, accepting the deceptions and deaths which surround it. Hitchcock has been very careful to balance the attractiveness of the individuals against their involvement with treachery and spying. Devereaux, the putative hero (who is nonetheless cheating on his wife), remains something of an emotional cipher, dispassionate and distant even as he



The death of Jarré (Frederick Stafford, (Claude Jade).

carries out the actions the success of which we are evidently supposed to desire. In the process, though, he accepts, as necessary consequences of his investigations, the disappearance of the Mendozas and the deaths of Uribe and Juanita De Cordoba (the latter sadly at first, it is true, but by the film's end he seems to have forgotten all about her), and he is willing to use his son-in-law with scarcely a concern for his safety. By contrast, Rico Parra is easily the most compelling figure in the film emotionally, yet is engaged in torture and commits the only on-screen murder. Even Juanita De Cordoba makes use of the Mendozas, and betrays Nicole, who has never met her, and Rico, who truly loves her. Each of these actions and its consequences may be necessary for one reason or another, and perhaps even justifiable on a utilitarian political scale, but each removes the person a step further from a genuinely human community (it is worth reminding ourselves that Michael Nordstrom, the most successful of the characters in political terms (he obtains every result for which he works), has no personal life whatsoever, so far as the film is concerned). Each political success requires further corrosions of personal trust and trustworthiness.

Seen thus, *Topaz* can be understood to require exactly the apparent structural and narrative instability, and indeed confusion, which it demonstrates. Hitchcock has poured an acidic new wine into a very old wineskin and then stepped back to watch the container disintegrate.¹⁵ Each shift in *Topaz* betrays the viewer's

expectations not merely as a twist in the plot but in regard to the structure and content of the story itself. Every element, whether it be one of characterization, of imagery, or even simply the film's apparently loose structure, contributes to the final powerful denunciation of the status quo and those who maintain it; the film's elusiveness within the conventions of its genre defies easy assimilation, and undercuts the comfort of the viewer, who is, by the very nature of their ability to watch the film in that comfort, already complicit in the system under attack.

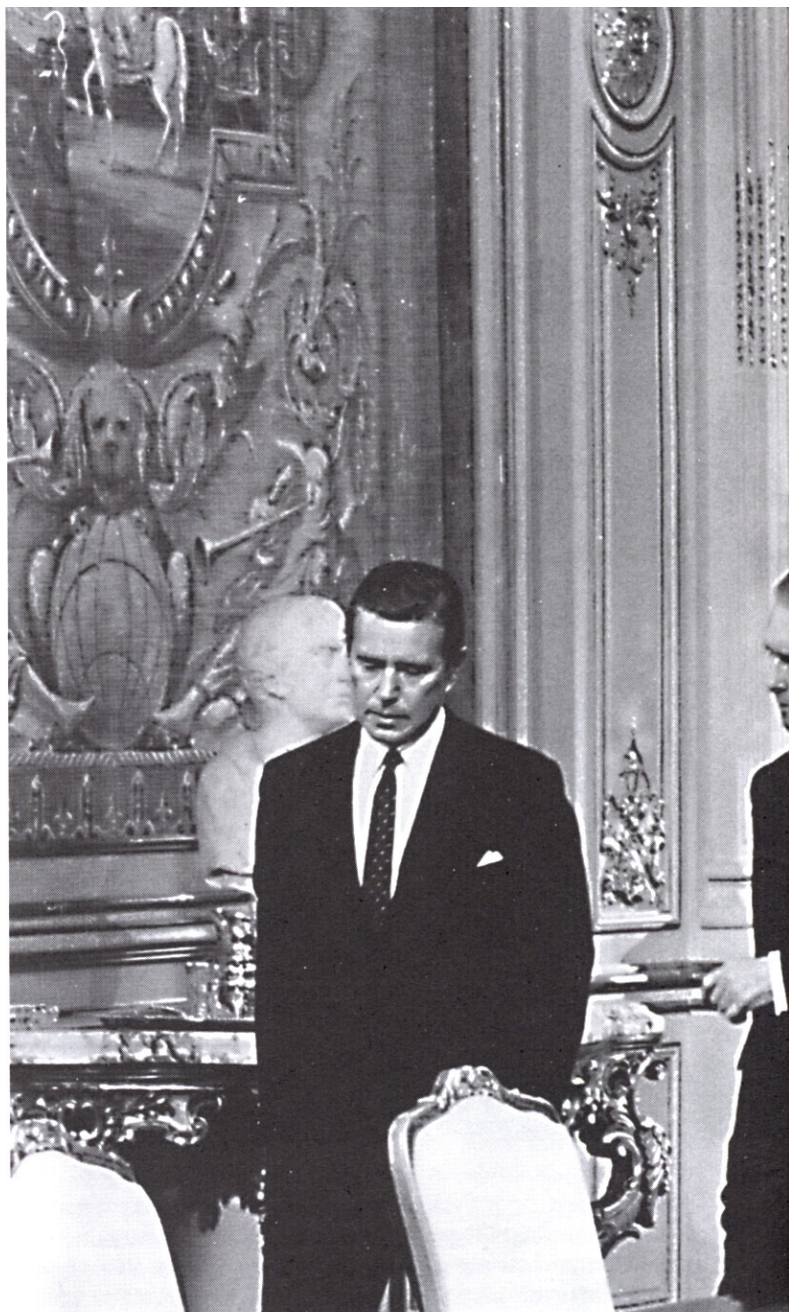
It may be argued that this latter point is banal at best, as is the one I made above about the viewer's response within a darkened theatre, but it is in fact this very banality of reaction which Hitchcock uses to make absolutely clear the depth of our complicity; were the points esoteric, were there real doubts about the moral distance between audience and characters, the impact of *Topaz* would be considerably lessened. Hitchcock has used the conventional nature of our responses against us in a most striking manner; he has seen to it that it is at precisely the most catastrophic moments in the film that the imagery is most beautiful. *Topaz*, as a film, rarely draws attention to itself. When it does, the imagery concerns moral events the nature of which seems to demand that camera, and by extension audience, eschew visual virtuosity; it is in the two most brutal and direct corruptions of human contact and intimacy that *Topaz* reaches its aesthetic peaks: the image of the tortured Mendozas and the murder of

Juanita De Cordoba. In making these moments so gorgeous, by luring us into admiring his cinematic skill just when we ought to be most horrified at what is transpiring on the screen, Hitchcock has simultaneously betrayed our expectations and tricked us into betraying ourselves. As is so often the case, the image triumphs over the reality, and does so with our complete acquiescence. Just as most members of the film's audience, then and now, will never think to protest against the existence of the nation-states which not only use, but require, exactly the sorts of treachery, deceit, and murder seen here, most will be more impressed by the death-images of the Mendozas and Juanita De Cordoba than by their actual murders.

One of the complaints occasionally registered concerning *Topaz* is its comparative lack of stars; there is no one with whom we can easily identify. To describe the putative problem should by now be already to indicate that it is no problem at all, but a calculated move in support of the film's central concern. In removing one of the standard indicators of where our moral sympathies should lie, Hitchcock has signaled, right from the beginning, that we, like the characters in the film, are alone in a morally indifferent world. To cast someone of the stature and name value as, say, Cary Grant, would tilt the audience's sympathy too quickly and too easily toward the character he portrayed. It is one of the signal triumphs of *Notorious* that Hitchcock makes us feel at least a touch of dislike for Grant's character Devlin, but the story there was quite different than here, and a similar tack in *Topaz* would have failed. There is no one in *Topaz* who is either wholly likable or wholly dislikeable, whatever their allegiances, and this balance of reactions is vital to the film's vision. The same is true of the acting; the related complaint that the performances, and filming, of Frederick Stafford and Dany Robin lack passion misses an important point: while perhaps not every element was intentional, the net result is that we find these central characters slightly dehumanized, leaving a moral and emotional gap at the center of the film. This gap is no doubt disconcerting, and perhaps even off-putting, but anything else would be a betrayal of the essence of the film. In a sense, *Topaz* is one of the few espionage thrillers which gets it right at its conclusion; individual happy endings which leave the political foundations untouched are at best ambivalent, if not outright misrepresentations. Thus we are allowed the merest hint of a reconciliation, but only one between two damaged individuals, and with no clear sense that anything essential has changed. Had Nicole and André Devereaux been played by more passionate actors, or had their scenes been more linguistically elegant and less drawn out, the ending of *Topaz* would have been less ambiguous and possibly more satisfying, but it would have been much less honest as a document of humanity corrupted by its own institutions.¹⁶

Topaz is not a perfect film. But conventional criticisms have relied too much on assumptions alien to its intentions and overly simplistic in regard to its execution. The once popular view of Hitchcock as a mere entertainer skilled in cinematic manipulation has long been superseded, yet somehow a few films, *Topaz* chief among them, have been left behind, sacrifices, as it were, to the ghosts of that vision. With this essay, I hope to have exorcised at least the most active of those ghosts, and to have shown that *Topaz* deserves considerably more attention and appreciation than it has hitherto received, from thoughtful moviegoers and film scholars alike.

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Notes

1 Dan Auiler, *Hitchcock's Notebooks: An Authorized and Illustrated Look Inside the Creative Mind of Alfred Hitchcock*. New York City, Avon, 1999, p. 443. Raymond Bellour, "Hitchcock—Endgame". In Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalez, eds., *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*. London, British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 179-184, p. 179.

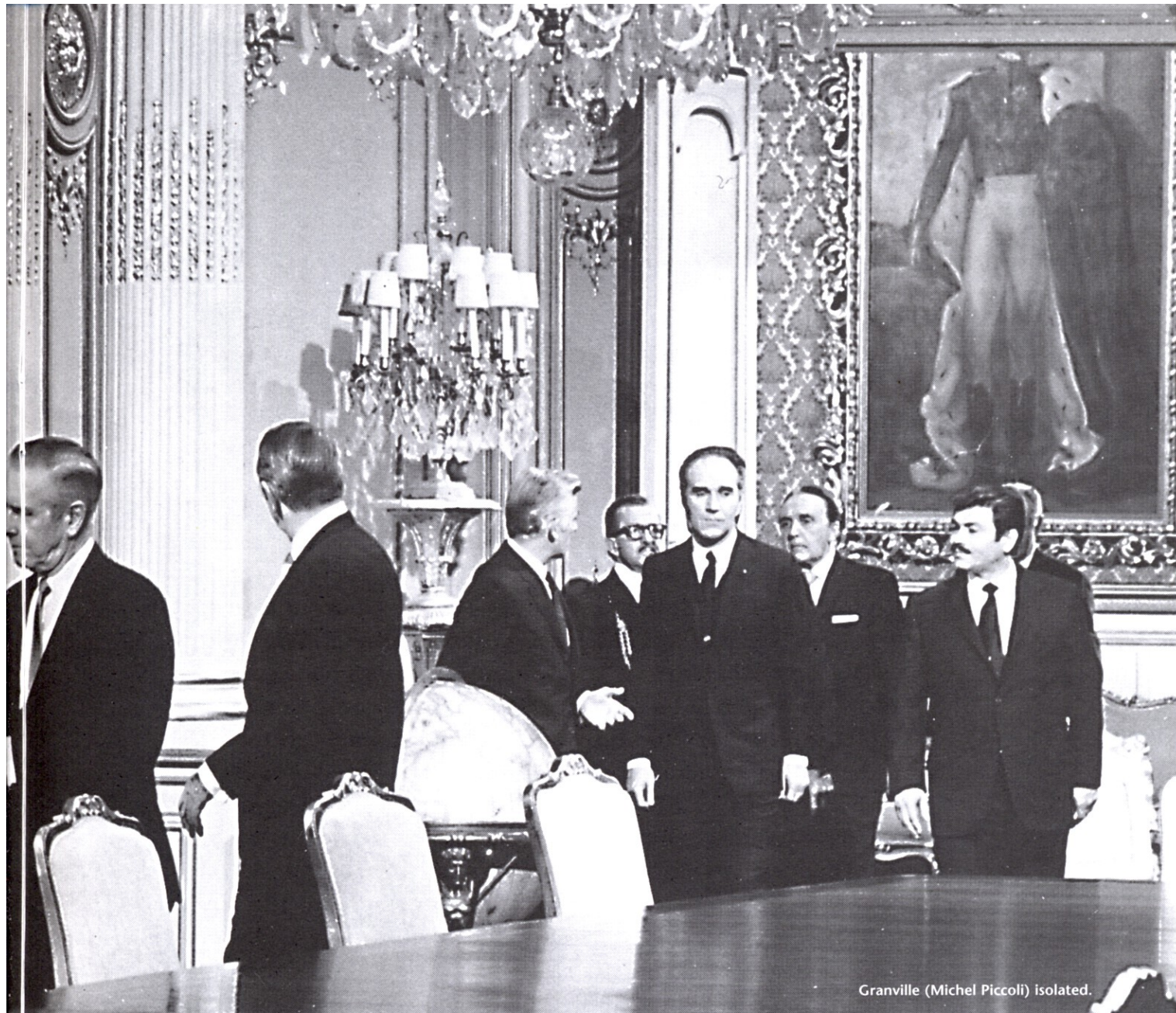
2 Although Maurice Jarré's score has on the whole dated noticeably, and at times sounds as if he did not take the assignment quite seriously, the march is exactly what is required; even Bernard Herrmann probably could not have surpassed the opening music here.

3 Significantly, given what later passes between various couples in the film, it is a representation of a man and woman kissing that is shattered.

4 That Nicole should like Nordstrom should be no surprise; Nordstrom is one of the few characters, and the only one with whom Nicole has any significant interaction, who is exactly what he appears, and claims, to be. Like Rico Parra, who we have yet to meet, he is brutal but he gets results. The price each man pays is likewise similar; Parra will destroy what he loves, and Nordstrom has no visible emotional life whatsoever. Nicole may resent what Nordstrom does to and with her husband, but she understands and respects his choice and his commitment. It is a kind of choice and commitment her husband seems unable to make.

5 The scene in which Devereaux and Nicole meet Michele and François contains Hitchcock's cameo, which is itself an amusing comment regarding the duplicity with which *Topaz* is suffused. Hitchcock appears in a wheelchair, evidently an invalid. Without warning he stands smoothly, greets someone, and walks quickly off camera.

6 While it is beyond the scope of this essay to develop the point in depth, note should be taken of the floral motif which informs many of the scenes in *Topaz*. Not



Granville (Michel Piccoli) isolated.

only do flowers of a particular color, especially yellow and white flowers in various arrangements, serve as links between scenes, the code name of the top Soviet agent in France—Columbine—is itself an ironic allusion to the motif.

7 That Dubois's attitude is conscious is made clear as he parts from Devereaux to begin his assignment. "Watch yourself," Devereaux tells Dubois. "It's the best thing I do," the latter responds. In the world depicted here, not to watch out for oneself above all is to court disaster.

8 The scene is linked to the preceding one, as well as to the death of Juanita De Cordoba, by the lavender color of Nicole's dress.

9 André is carrying a wrapped gift for Juanita, ostensibly "nylon things from the United States." As we quickly learn, this is a lie, but it is covered with another lie, this one explicit: "I hope your government won't mind," André says to Rico, "I didn't inform the customs." Rico merely nods and changes the subject.

10 The shot of Juanita's dress pooling out underneath her as she falls is rightly celebrated; much less noticed is the fact that the color of the dress closely matches the color of the ribbon displayed so insouciantly by Dubois following his escape and the revelation of Uribe's treachery, the beginning of the sequence of events which led ineluctably to Juanita's death.

11 Kusenov's defection, although a betrayal of the Soviet Union, cannot be considered a betrayal of the political order, since it does not involve betraying anything which remains politically vital to him. The introductory intertitle makes clear that Kusenov's action is motivated, at least in part, by his concern with the direction the Soviet Union is taking politically. It is only later that he begins to have, or at least to express, reservations.

12 There is another small betrayal here, in addition the obvious one; Granville makes a passing mention to Jarré of "my dear wife," who is conveniently absent during his tryst with Nicole Devereaux.

13 As do flowers, mirrors play an important role throughout the film; an entire essay could be written on this aspect of the set design alone.

14 In one of the alternate endings, Hitchcock makes the point rather more bluntly; the newspaper headline asserting the end of the crisis is held while images of the tortured Mendozas, the dead Jarré, the death of Juanita De Cordoba, and Devereaux's anguish on the plane from Havana are superimposed as the opening march plays. Despite the suicide of Granville shown a moment earlier, the ending remains anything but happy.

15 That this is not merely an accident of an unfocused screenplay and directorial inattention becomes clear as we consider the care with which Hitchcock has used the subsidiary imagery within the film. I have already mentioned the incidental use of flowers, mirrors, and cigars as linking motifs; it is highly improbable that the direction of a film so carefully organized as to its details would at the same have proceeded haphazardly as regards the primary matters of plot, casting, and characterization.

16 The degree to which Hitchcock intended what we see of these performances is unknowable, but two pieces of indirect evidence at least suggest that he was aware of what he was getting. One is found in the many comments by actors that Hitchcock hired them because their performance style fit his conception of the character at hand (where stars were foisted on Hitchcock, he often expressed dissatisfaction with the results). The other is a matter of comparison; the performances in *Topaz* which need to be passionate are passionate, and it would be an odd coincidence if just those performances which serve the overall vision of the film by being impersonal merely happened to be impersonal. The point cannot now be proven, I think, but it is at least arguable that Hitchcock's casting was both deliberate and, within the bounds of his complex vision for the film, largely successful.

THIS IS NOT A GAME

Alan J. Pakula's *Rollover*

BY JACK HUGHES

This piece will argue for Alan J. Pakula's 1981 film *Rollover* as an undervalued work, and I think the underlying premise—that no one places much value on the film—is fairly uncontroversial. I've been bringing it up in conversations here and there for the last few months and I've barely found anyone who's even heard of it. It's available on video (not on DVD) but isn't among the 9,000 titles at the Toronto Film Reference Library; an Internet search turns up nothing except bland movie-encyclopedia citations. Leonard Maltin's guide calls it "laughably pretentious, barely comprehensible."¹ Of a handful of comments on the Internet Movie Database, this one is not too untypical; "The short side of the story is that this has to be one of the worst movies I have ever seen. Rhythm-wise, the movie is dead. It makes you feel like you are attending a lecture on economy at the university. And to think that I watched the movie because it was described as a 'thriller!'"

It's About Money

Rollover, a fundamentally pessimistic film despite an overall accessible tone and a final note of hope, posits that the interdependency of the financial system is unsustainable, and that a ripple of eroded confidence might bring it down. I personally think the film is a masterpiece, but I can see how reasonable people might differ on this. It hasn't aged well in some respects, and even if you like its aesthetic strategy as I do, you might not think it amounts to such a big deal in the scheme of things. What's less disputable, I think, is the film's enterprise in seeking to depict the complexity of the global financial system, and the ongoing relevance of this treatment. In a more realistic (albeit heavier-hearted) world, *Rollover* could be a contemporary equivalent for *The Wizard Of Oz* or *Rebel Without A Cause*, a film that finds new resonance with each succeeding generation even as the advance of time anchors it more firmly and distantly in its period.

The film is about money, one of the very few non-documentary films (the only one I can really think of, but I won't claim perfect knowledge) that's about money in its macro-economic rather than its direct, visceral manifestation. Of course we can all recall any number of movies containing scenes of dollar bills changing hands or being counted or



Rollover: Jane Fonda and Kris Kristofferson



Mysterious other: Fonda and Kristofferson.

thrown in the air or poured onto a naked woman, and it might be that every third or fourth movie is in some way about the corrosive effects of wealth (or its correlatives) or the desire to attain it. But if banking and finance are depicted at all, they're likely to be mere facades for generalized power-lust and narcissistic excess. I can think of a few movies—*Wall Street*, *Boiler Room*, *Other People's Money*—that tried to illuminate some of the capitalist machinery, but in varying degrees they're all flatly melodramatic. Oddly enough, *Trading Places*, with its climax turning on a play on orange futures, is one of the few films that evokes something of the system's huge opaque power.

And when did you hear people in movies discuss the deficit or the debt or the balance of payments? Of course, you don't hear much in movies about the family values agenda either, and the US election seemed to show that this is a more pressing issue to the heartland voter than the machinations of the economy, however grim those might be. But cinema hasn't served us well here. God knows one never tires of love and relationships, but mightn't one of our leading filmmakers reflect that the incremental benefit to the audience of one more illustration of human foibles would likely be less than that of a rigorous examination of the influences that govern our future? Even *The Corporation*, so biting and periodically insightful on the erroneous way of companies, missed the big picture by failing to explore the complicity of governments (and, for that matter, that of greedy, complacent investors) in all this. So Pakula's enterprise in taking this on still strikes me as commendable, and would be even if the execution had been botched.

Like A Romp

Initially the film plays like a romp (the title, if you knew nothing else about it, might have suggested something in the tradition of *Pillow Talk* and *Move Over Darling*; *Cahiers du Cinema's* review cited Blake Edwards). Jane Fonda plays Lee Winters, a former film star

now married to the head of WinterChem, an oil conglomerate. When her husband is murdered, apparently by a burglar, she sets out to replace him at the head of the WinterChem board, but her fellow directors resist her. Searching for a big power play to boost her position, she identifies a Spanish petrochemical plant as an acquisition target, but she needs to arrange financing, and the company is already tapped out with its bank, Borough National. The new head of that (faltering) bank is Hub Smith (Kris Kristofferson), a financial wizard parachuted in on a rescue mission, and equally in need of a quick deal. He agrees to broker the loan (for a commission), they become lovers, and he travels with her to Saudi Arabia to make a pitch to potential lenders. The Saudis extend an offer, but demand that she put up her shares of company stock as collateral. Although Kristofferson assures her that the bank will cover her, she almost balks at the deal. He addresses her doubts, it seems, by deflecting them, by asserting the significance of their relationship. She accepts the deal and becomes chair of the board (the film uses the term "chairman").

This first half of the film concludes on a montage of Fonda and Kristofferson playing touch football, clearly happy and abandoned, closing on a freeze frame which could easily be the closing shot of many movies. So up to this point in the film, leaving aside an ominous beginning, the tone is mostly playful, the action consisting primarily of fairly short, breezy scenes. Kristofferson and Fonda may be dealing with hundreds of millions of dollars, but they're also having fun. When a Borough National colleague tells Kristofferson "this is not some sort of game," Kristofferson contradicts him, adding "You can't beat the system, but you can win a game." The first time he meets Fonda, he refers to her fellow board members as "Tweedledum and Tweedledee", and their romantic attraction seems to flow initially from the shared adrenalin of deal-making and outsmarting the stuffed shirts.

The film's second half is significantly more somber. Borough

National has a narrow escape when Arabian investors seem to be pulling out their loans and demanding instant repayment (which would trigger a fatal cash shortage at the bank). The loans are re-deposited (rolled over) only at the last minute, except for \$5 million that's transferred into an account at another bank, First New York (headed by the Greenspan-like Maxwell Emery, played by Hume Cronyn). Fonda finds a tape recording of a conversation between her husband and a federal bank examiner; she tracks the man down and he tells her that her husband was killed after he learned of this same account (shortly afterwards, the bank examiner apparently kills himself). Kristofferson slips into Cronyn's office and accesses his computer, then puts the plot together: through the First New York account, Cronyn is facilitating the slow removal of the Arab deposits out of the American banking system. Cronyn predicts that Kristofferson will hold his silence—if the plan were revealed, economic and consumer confidence would plummet, maybe even bringing about a systemic collapse.

But Fonda, approaching the information in purely personal terms, reads it as a sign of trouble at Borough National, assumes Kristofferson is somehow implicated, and worries about the safety of her collateral. Jettisoning the relationship, she approaches the Saudis with a deal—her silence in return for a renegotiation of her loan. After a failed attempt on her life, sensing imminent loss of control over the situation, the Saudis withdraw all their deposits from American banks. Global financial chaos follows. Cronyn shoots himself.

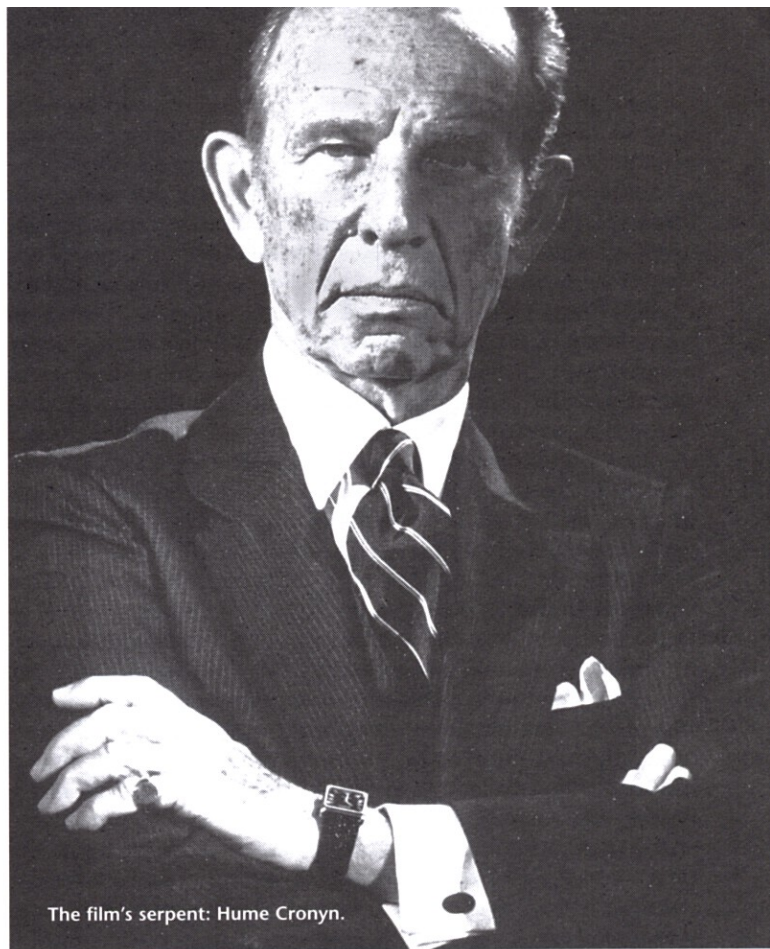
And Kristofferson is left alone in the now darkened trading room. He can't be doing anything coherent there—maybe he's there for the same reason that the zombies in *Dawn Of The Dead* hang around the mall. Fonda approaches out of the darkness. They look at each other; she sits. "I've been worried about you," he says. She asks: "How are you?" He: "Like everybody else. Looking for a way to begin again." She: "You're gonna need a partner." And the film fades out.

At this point I might mention that when I'm not watching and writing about film, I work in the securities regulation business, so I have a certain professional familiarity with some of the film's concepts. Even allowing for that, it's weird to recount a plot in which the suspense attached to loan reinvestment decisions is far greater than that generated by the attack on Fonda's life. That aside though, the plot is essentially simple in its linearity; get past the high-falutin' finance talk and it's all A leading to B leading to C. The film seems distinctly under populated at times—beyond Fonda and Kristofferson and Cronyn, there are really only four or five character parts of any significance. Richard Schickel's negative review in *Time* pivoted on "the childish ease with which (Fonda and Kristofferson) penetrate the conspiracy."²

Calculating Aesthetic

Rollover is gorgeously shot (by Giuseppe Rotunno): a world of rich, glistening surfaces and textures, where money and technology merge into a lavish but preoccupied playground. Without ever appearing strained or woodenly referential, it rapidly establishes a calculated but remarkably diverse aesthetic. Within the first ten minutes, three different scenes establish the film's substantial visual literacy.

Its opening shot commences in darkness, and as the credits begin, the screen lights up with a wall of columns of numbers, headed DMK/Sterling/Swiss/D FLS. It pans right and another wall lights up. Then another, then another. As it continues, the angles become more oblique, allowing us a sense of contours, and then the middle of the room becomes clear, with terminals, a cleaner pushing a cart, a control station with a map of the world behind it. About halfway through the credits the camera reaches its destina-



The film's serpent: Hume Cronyn.

tion point and holds it there, observing the room until the roll ends and it fades to a daytime hubbub of activity. Pakula described this as "an overture to establish (a) kind of heightened reality."³ (At the end of the film, the film reprises the shot in reverse, taking us from the room of devastated bankers back to darkness and desolation).

A few minutes later, the film dramatizes the murder of Fonda's husband. He's sitting at his desk in a darkened office, and his killer appears suddenly from behind the curtain. It's a somewhat lurid but intensely expressive montage, reminiscent in its formality (if not its details and implications) of the shower scene in *Psycho*. The close-up splattering of blood on the documents on his desk, and then on a framed picture of Fonda, introduces a recurring visual motif—an outburst of red (more blood later; Fonda's lips) in the middle of a generally somber frame. The construction is obviously melodramatic, and the defiling of Fonda's image suggests a sadistic streak that doesn't come to fruition, but it's still a stunning outburst.

The film cuts to a mysterious figure on the street outside (we later learn he's the agent for the Saudi Arabian lenders), and then to the first of numerous party scenes, opening on a whale, encompassing its left eye and pectoral fin, then panning down to a glittering social event below. I have seen the film too many times to recall the disorientation that presumably accompanies this image at first viewing—the party is at the Museum of Natural History and the whale is suspended from the ceiling. Following on, the scene locates the film's three main players within just a few elegant shots, already hinting at the claustrophobia that will become strangely central to its impact. Fonda receives the news of her husband's murder, and the camera moves away from her stunned reaction ("I was just thinking about the illusion of safety," says Kristofferson in voice over), fading into another pan across the room—except the sound is muted now, rendering everything strange and distant - before returning into the eye. If the first shot of the whale seems in isolation to represent a glorious evocation of

nature at its most imposing, captured and rendered inert, yielding to the film's hermetic subculture, that return journey leaves the equilibrium much harder to analyze.

And so on through the film—there is hardly a shot that seems merely plain or functional. The question though is whether this fuses into a meaningful strategy. I think it does, but when so few viewers seem to have got the point, one has to wonder. For the contemporary viewer, there are further problems, because of course nothing dates a movie as much as its notion of the cutting edge. The film, made just pre-personal computer, now looks quaint with its gargantuan hardware and LED displays. And of course the vocabulary of Hollywood has become so hyperactive that we lap up zooms and pans of impossible complexity as shruggingly as close-ups. So Pakula's opening "overture" might now seem borderline naïve in its belief that we could be impressed by such a conception. And maybe it always was.

Orphan Child

I'll admit to loving *Rollover* all the more for its orphan child quality. Pakula's paranoia trilogy—*Klute*, *The Parallax View*, *All The President's Men*—seemed at the time to nail their various zeitgeists, and they're still wonderful to watch, but it's questionable how much they can mean to us now. I doubt many modern women can respond other than theoretically to *Klute*'s feminist triangulations, and we might all wish we had enough faith in our governing institutions that conspiracy and skullduggery had the capacity to shake it. But for reasons I'll return to, *Rollover*, far less resonant when it was released, seems increasingly prophetic and meaningful.

It was meant to be a major film of course. Several press accounts of the time picked up on its crusading ambitions. A New York magazine article, *Principles and Profits*, had the following headline:

"...Rollover is the new venture of Jane Fonda's production company (IPC Films), which is earning big bucks by espousing causes." ⁴The article quoted Fonda as follows: "I think it's an important film, and it's by far the most complex subject matter we've tackled or probably ever will tackle. It's hard to build a melodrama and explain how the banks and the economy work. For me *Rollover* is the biggest question mark of the films we've done. People are going to feel strongly one way or another."

One would never have guessed from this article, and from the run of success that led up to it (*Coming Home*, *The China Syndrome*, *Nine to Five*, *On Golden Pond*) that IPC was a spent force. Bruce Gilbert, Fonda's partner in the company, worked with her only on two more minor ventures, *The Dollmaker* and *The Morning After*, and his producing career petered out altogether in the mid-90's. And of course Fonda, perhaps the top female star at the time, would soon disappear from the screen as well (until this year's pending return in *Monster In Law*). And after the following year's *Sophie's Choice* Pakula was never the same either. All as if *Rollover*'s failure displaced itself onto the fates of its key players.

American Archetypes

Apart from its meticulous mise en scene, the film's most prominent aesthetic strategy is the depiction of the Fonda and Kristofferson characters as mythic American archetypes. Pakula described this strategy at some length in a 1982 interview, stating:

The hero and heroine embody traditional hero and heroine qualities rather than whole characters. In a melodrama dealing with such complex issues, this kind of stylization seemed to me appropriate. And it also, of course, made a point; it was a reminder of the simplicity of certain American success myths.⁵



A dream is dying.

So Fonda, as an ex-film star, is exquisitely made up and shot throughout; in a couple of scenes, in tight close up with blood-red lipstick and gathered-up hair, she's as vivid and iconic, as sublimely dangerous and yet impeccably imprisoned within the frame as a Hitchcock heroine. Knowing her subsequent identity as corporate wife and grand lady, it's remarkably premonitory.

The casting of Kristofferson, then more clearly than now associated with his cowboy persona—is even more striking. In his first scene he uses lines like “I hear you rode in on your white horse” and “That’s the spirit that built the West.” Later on, Pakula stages as a quasi-shootout the key confrontation between Kristofferson and Cronyn. It’s the film’s most stylish use of the aesthetics of acting: Kristofferson’s impassivity, mostly shot in screen-filling close-up or shoulder shot, contrasting with the full-figure depiction of the highly mobile Cronyn, pontificating with one hand tucked into his breast pocket while the other hand gestures with a cigarette. While Kristofferson insists on an absolute morality (even in banking), Cronyn argues that capital is “a force of nature...it flows where it wants to flow,” and his tumble of rationalizations, coupled with his slitheriness within the frame, confirms him as the film’s serpent.

The film hints intriguingly that the characters are aware of their artificiality, and play into it. “We’re playing a classic scene aren’t we,” says Fonda during their first meeting at her home, “the banker and the widow.” Later, after they’ve become lovers, Kristofferson returns from a tense night at the bank with his shirt unbuttoned down to his waist, a bottle in one hand and two glasses in the other, striding up the stairs with a swagger that borders on the comic; he kicks her bedroom door open, stands for a moment in silhouette (another iconic gunfighter pose) and gets on top of her (“I feel like the sack of Carthage,” she says later). Coming on the heels of Kristofferson’s shaken potency at *Borough National*, it seems that raw reversion to the archetype is an inherent part of how he accesses his sexual compensation.

It follows that the characters are barely invested with introspection, and the dialogue between the two stars is minimal. The seduction scene, utterly wordless, is a gorgeous single shot; he arrives in the lobby to pick her up for dinner; she sweeps magnificently down the stairs; as he’s helping her with her coat he starts kissing her neck; she turns and they embrace fully; she arches backwards as the kissing intensifies; she pulls him backwards toward the staircase and leads him upstairs, frequently stopping to kiss and embrace until he picks her up and carries her the final steps of the journey. At the top of the stairs, the camera stays on an abstract painting as their departing silhouettes sweep out of shot, then the movement continues into the next scene, of the two now-lovers arriving late for dinner. It’s a wonderfully orchestrated scene, but entirely artificial, devoid of any real emotion or sexuality—the juxtaposition of the painting and the silhouettes serves as a neat indicator of how much relative weight to assign to this connection.

But the problem with all this is that viewers, insufficiently cued to interpret *Rollover* as an abstraction (should Pakula have anticipated Lars von Trier and shot on a blank stage?), simply took the characters at face value and found them lacking. The *Toronto Star* review at the time opened as follows:

***Rollover* quickly gets its priorities straight. This is supposed to be a film about the end of the fiscal world, but the movie—not to mention the audience—is much more concerned with what breathtaking gown Jane Fonda will wear next.⁶**

Virtually every paragraph of what follows pivots on the same theme (“*Rollover* is Harold Robbins done up by people with a little

more taste, but not much”), before concluding:

For her part, Fonda reassures us that things aren’t so bad that we can’t still be diverted by the sight of a beautifully dressed movie star. Given the state of the world, that’s possibly the most valuable piece of knowledge the movies are letting us in on at the moment.⁷

That last sentence sums up the gorgeous ambiguity of the review—scornful of what it regards as the movie’s superficiality, but unable to grapple with it in any other way. Still, there’s a valid point in there somewhere: the use of the cowboy and film star archetypes pegs *Rollover* as a fantasy, but as one deeply rooted in the country’s myth of endurance and mobility. I mentioned how, at the end of the film, the fiscal system has collapsed, and images of turmoil play on TV screens. But as the assembled people of *Borough National* watch in horror, the TV commentator quotes FDR: “This great nation will endure as it has endured...Each age is a dream that is dying, or one that is coming to birth.” And then Fonda and Kristofferson, alone in the desolate trading room, look to the next step and assert their partnership. “As for the hope at the end of the film?” said Pakula. “Well, the essence of characters like these is American optimism. To deny them that at the end would be to deny their essence.”⁸

But earlier in the same interview, he said: “*Rollover* deals with a class of people who, while making decisions that affect the whole society, are themselves often cut off from society. They are people living behind glass walls far above the crowd, or insulated in limousines.”⁹ Maybe it’s not surprising that a privileged Hollywood director would so easily attribute homespun values to a rarified elite. Note that their essence couldn’t just be “optimism”—it had to be “American optimism”—and given the havoc in which they’re complicit, maybe the least they deserved was to have their essence denied, or indeed snuffed out (Andrew Sarris, in *The Village Voice*, called the conclusion “fatuous,” adding rather mystifyingly: “One wonders when well-heeled ideologues of the left will ever get it through their skulls that the loss of the most meager savings and possessions can traumatize the great masses of the not-so-rich into a mood receptive to tyrannies most bloody and cruel.”)¹⁰

I think though that the film as it stands is ambiguous about the weight of this optimism. I talked already about the seduction scene, and the closing reunion plays very quickly and almost as wordlessly. Fonda and Kristofferson don’t touch: we last see them in a rather ungainly medium shot, framed in darkness as they stare at each other. Before the moment has any opportunity to register, the credits roll, accompanied by plaintive, minor-key music lacking any of the opening score’s jauntiness. So there is optimism for sure, but indeed it’s barely more than an essence, with every prospect of being snuffed out by what might happen minutes or days later. In a Hawks movie, Fonda’s line “You’re gonna need a partner” would be an expression of mature desire; here it seems like she’s appropriating Kristofferson’s Western vernacular to cover up the demolition of her own myth.

Looked at another way, the characters’ composure resembles madness. Regardless of Pakula’s intentions, his careful evocation of Hollywood and Western myth through Fonda and Kristofferson seems primarily like a denunciation of the inadequacy of these myths. Which is another respect in which *Rollover* seems prescient, for in Washington and California, Western and Hollywood myths currently hold sway over all, with at best mixed regard for our long term challenges.

Sense Of Impotence

Rollover seems to me gripped by a sense of impotence. The movie seems to lack a sense of turmoil and noise and stress (hence the name WinterChem?). I suppose that in truth maybe too many of the decisions that affect us are made by a small group of unaccountable people in an airless room. But to fixate on that group—probably beyond identification and detection, if truly so powerful—seems to deny our own collective complicity in their power (not that I am trying here to naively assert the possibility of group action against the towers of high finance). Still, the film's relative simplicity ultimately only increases its scariness. The film posits a scarily direct route to financial collapse. It's as if Lee and Hub's shenanigans allowed them to stumble toward the system's Achilles heel, bypassing all the layers of control and regulation. Pakula said the characters "believe in themselves as brilliant manipulators possessing all the skills and drives that make the successful think they can control whatever they do." The twist of course is that they are themselves being manipulated. He went on: "The film deals with hubris, the hubris of a certain kind of simplistic individualism."¹¹

But again, the film slightly underachieves in setting out this thesis, because it too confidently takes the characters' resonance to be largely self-evident. Their reversal of fortune, from manipulator to manipulated, thus fails to register as it might have (it's most evident in the distinction of tone between what I called the film's two halves). For example, this is probably Fonda's most oblique performance from her starring period. It's impossible to imagine what kind of actress Lee Winters could ever have been; she's unemotive, closed off. If it's hubris, it barely manifests itself externally; it seems merely like momentum. The love affair is much more a matter of genre and proximity than of human connection. Richard Combs wrote as follows:

Hubbell Smith and Lee Winters, in fact, are defined so thoroughly in terms of movie stereotypes and expectations that the film comes to deny—almost despite itself—one of the tenets of faith of previous Pakula: the restorative power of romantic love.¹²

That "almost despite itself" seems, if read impolitely, like a signpost to another gap between Pakula's intention and his execution. Pakula conceived the characters as archetypes, but he surely believed he could invest them with specificity. In the press notes from the time, Fonda and Kristofferson both appear to describe an approach to their characters involving a traditional amount of research and preparation. But I think Combs is correct that the intricacy of the overall conception swamps any possibility of genuine emotion.

In much of the above, it seems I'm praising *Rollover* for reasons other than those Pakula might have had in mind. Of course, if this were an inherent problem, then much of the last forty years' writing on Hollywood cinema might be in jeopardy. But Pakula seems to have been an eloquent commentator on his own work, and an undeniably careful craftsman, and I find myself a little uncomfortable arguing for his mastery of his film on a "despite of more than because of him" basis.

Recall the Pakula quote that opens David Thomson's entry on him in *The Biographical Dictionary Of Cinema*: "I am oblique, I think that has to do with my own nature. I like trying to do things which work on many levels, because I think it is terribly important to give an audience a lot of things they may not get as well as those they will, so that finally the film does take on a texture and is not just simplistic communication." Thomson's dry comment

on this remarkable piece of self-actualization: "Pakula is a little simpler than he hopes."¹³ Still, the director's insistence on complexity made him the perfect illuminator of 70s paranoia. But although I am too young to know for sure, it seems to me (as I speculated earlier) that Pakula's theme of conspiracy and skullduggery was always overplayed—that it might not have been such an achievement to take Watergate and multiple assassinations and extrapolate them into a sculptured jitteriness.

And look at what Pakula generated when he stepped away from that theme: *The Sterile Cookie*, *Love and Pain and the Whole Damn Thing*, *Comes A Horseman*, *Starting Over*, *Sophie's Choice*, *Dream Lover*, *Orphans*, *See You In The Morning*. I like some of those movies (I have a feeling, based on more than fifteen years' remove, that *Dream Lover* in particular might warrant rediscovery), but except for *Sophie's Choice*, they left barely a trace on cinema history or on anyone that ever saw them. They're not bland or anonymous though—you can feel Pakula trying to work on many levels, to avoid simplistic communication. And it's not that he fails—it's perhaps (if you're looking for an aphorism) that great cinema involves the oblique, textured, non-simplistic communication of something fundamentally quite simple and transforming, and Pakula never knew what that something was.

Better those movies than the final four—*Presumed Innocent*, *Consenting Adults*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Devil's Own*—which seem like little more than maintaining a career, although the last exhibited some confused attempts to tap political relevance. So when you add that up, we're not left with a lot. Except that I could write and talk about *Rollover* almost indefinitely.

Crystal Ball

Part of this is the joy of any film that's so in tune with contemporary concerns. I don't want to go overboard on making an argument for the film based on prescience. A crystal ball may be a wonderment of its own sort, but it's not a touchstone for aesthetic achievement. Still, there are a few respects in which the film's continuing relevance is remarkable.

First is its evocation of attitudes about Saudi Arabia. A couple of comments on the Internet Movie Database pegged the movie as racist in this regard, but that makes the mistake of taking the film as realism. Trapped in their high-overhead sumptuousness, operating in a set of assumptions and customs so complex that even the best and the brightest have lost the thread (and still in the shadow of the 70s oil crises), *Rollover's* characters have no hope of engaging with the Saudis as anything other than a mysterious, all-powerful Other. It doesn't really matter in the film what the Saudis' motivation is—the only point is that we don't understand it. "You're playing with the end of the world you know," says Cronyn to one of them as the plot starts to unravel. "The end of the world as *you* know it," comes the reply, and it's all the more effective for its urbanity.

To the extent that the film conveys any specific sense of the Saudis, it consistently emphasizes how their affinity for Western values is tempered with adherence to their own mysterious (or at least unexplored) codes. At the start of Fonda and Kristofferson's trip to the country, a gleaming Rolls-Royce drives through the desert, passing a herd of camels, then a man standing at what appears to be a telephone pole. The car pulls up outside a tent surrounded by other luxury vehicles, and then we see a group of men apparently admiring a pair of falcons. I think that comes out as West 2, Mysterious Other 2.

I doubt that the sense most of us have of Saudi Arabia now is very far ahead from that implicit in *Rollover*. If you compare it to

Fahrenheit 9/11, you might conclude that our understanding of the country has merely shifted from a nightmare located at the nexus of oil and money to one combining oil and terrorism. Given that most of the 9/11 perpetrators were Saudi Arabian nationals, and given the rush to judgment in certain aspects of that event's aftermath, it's mildly surprising—even allowing for oil politics—that the country hasn't taken more knocks. Many saw the Saudi-baiting aspects of Moore's film as its crassest aspect. But whatever the lasting impact of that picture might be (and I am not guessing it will be much), it won't be to change our view of that country.

Because it's all too easy, almost soothing, to view the Saudis neurotically, but passively. The country's so damn rich, and it's the best kind of wealth, oil wealth, the kind that keeps flowing (or so we imagine, since Paul Hawken's devastating environmental exposé *The Ecology Of Commerce* has yet to impinge itself on our governing psyche). The Saudis are urbane and sophisticated, the most conspicuous consumers imaginable, so easy to fetishize. They're as hard to demonize psychologically as they are strategically. And it's not so tough to overlook the repression, the attitudes toward women—what family doesn't have its skeletons? I am being facetious of course, and my intention is not to suggest that Saudi Arabia should be defined as part of the "axis of evil." But whether or not *Rollover*'s portrayal of the country reflects well on the film, the fact that Saudi Arabia is generally no better understood now than it was then certainly reflects badly on much else.

But the film's main source of predictive distinction lies in how it grapples with global finance. It's worth noting how the threat that underlies the film—not in its specifics perhaps but in its general structure—keeps recurring. Peter C. Newman cited the film in a January 1983 *Maclean's* column titled "The looming roll-over threat." The threat there was of Third World default. He concisely sketched the pending nightmare as follows:

If waves of defaults from abroad should hit North American banks, the banks might have little choice but to retrench by recalling their domestic loans. Many customers thus threatened might be pushed into bankruptcy, in turn pinning the banks to the wall...¹⁴

I hope readers will allow me the following quotation, which seems to fall squarely into the category of predictions one might have wished were more prescient than they actually turned out to be:

This precarious economic situation is political dynamite. It simply isn't realistic, over the long term, to pretend that the economically underprivileged populations of Third World countries will meekly accept the kind of severe social welfare cutbacks demanded by their governments. How long can societies, already afflicted by glaring economic inequalities, corruption, growing unemployment and just plain hunger, accept the sacrifices demanded of them, all in the name of the liquidity of what they perceive to be Western "fat cat" banks?¹⁵

For how long? Well, keep counting, although I note with interest the emergence of the International Monetary Fund as film villain in *The Yes Men* and *The Take*. More recently, the growing structural deficit and accumulated debt in the US, coupled with the decline in value of the US dollar and the increasing strength of China, now gives rise to increasing fears about the US' own ability to service its obligations. The Wall Street Journal recently reported, as a further symptom of this, that even the US agricultural sector is

running a deficit, for the first time in twenty years.

Of course, the persistence of these fears, always in a slightly different form, could be cited as evidence of their overblown nature. It's possible that the true second oldest profession is that of prophet of doom. But the extent of industrialization, and the escalation of consumerism, in the past century, renders past precedents inadequate. We are truly flying blind on this now. There's something mesmerizing in how *Rollover* combines considerable narrative and social specificity with its appeal to myths which if not exactly timeless, are sufficiently dyed-in-the-wool from a contemporary audience's perspective that they connote continuity and stability of sorts. The film is still, at its simplest, a wake-up call in how the debunking of the lead characters' prowess provides a tangible challenge to complacency.

Crusader

But it's the work of a crusader, of course, to pose such a challenge, which does bring us back to a view of Pakula as an earnest Boy Scout kind of director. When I chose to write about *Rollover*, I thought I might entice the reader through a promise of complexity. Instead, I keep reverting to a feeling that the film, although way more complex than most, is a little simpler than it might have been. In this regard it's interesting to compare it to Olivier Assayas' *demonlover*. There's much more to Assayas' film than this alone, but among all its other achievements, its first half is a probing examination of commerce and its murky ripple effects. The film has the stylization, the ease with archetypes, the ceaseless illumination of governing structures that *Rollover* aspires to. And then of course it goes further, bringing everything down on itself, allowing madness to seep into the film's very structure. It's *difficult* in a way that *Rollover* never seems to aspire to. Not least because *demonlover* treats personal and institutional neurosis as being intertwined, whereas *Rollover*, by essentially stripping its characters of psychology, sees people essentially as moving pieces.

But *Rollover*, as Pakula hoped, nevertheless works "on many levels." Scene by scene, it's consistently fascinating, and its aesthetic strategies reward meticulous dissection by the viewer. Almost twenty-five years later, no other Hollywood film has come even close to grappling with its subject matter. And perhaps its meagre place in history is a much greater tribute than a bland status as a "minor classic" would be. Is it going too far to detect substantial ideological exhaustion in Maltin's dismissal of the film as "laughably pretentious, barely comprehensible"? Given the way things are going, maybe it's better for all of us to see it that way.

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Notes

- 1 Leonard Maltin, 2005 Movie & Video Guide, Plume, 2004, p.1181
- 2 Richard Schickel, "Fiscal Fizzle," *Time*, December 21, 1981, p.58
- 3 "Lichtenstein, Legends and Leviathan (The following is the response to a series of Questions submitted to Alan J. Pakula about his latest film, *Rollover*," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol XLIX nr.584, September 1982, p.216
- 4 William Wolf, "Principles And Profits," *New York*, December 14, 1981, p. 90
- 5 "Lichtenstein, Legends and Leviathan."
- 6 Ron Base, "All that glitters isn't gold," *Toronto Star*, December 11, 1981, p. D11
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "Lichtenstein, Legends and Leviathan."
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Andrew Sarris, *The Village Voice*, December 16, 1981
- 11 "Lichtenstein, Legends and Leviathan."
- 12 Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. XLIX nr. 583, August 1982, p. 155
- 13 David Thomson, *The New Biographical Dictionary Of Film*, Knopf, 2002, p.663
- 14 Peter C. Newman, "The looming roll-over threat," *Maclean's*, January 17, 1983

"But It's Good"

Finding Value in *Twentynine Palms*

BY JASON WILCOX

"Everything exists, nothing has value."

—Mrs Moore in E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924)

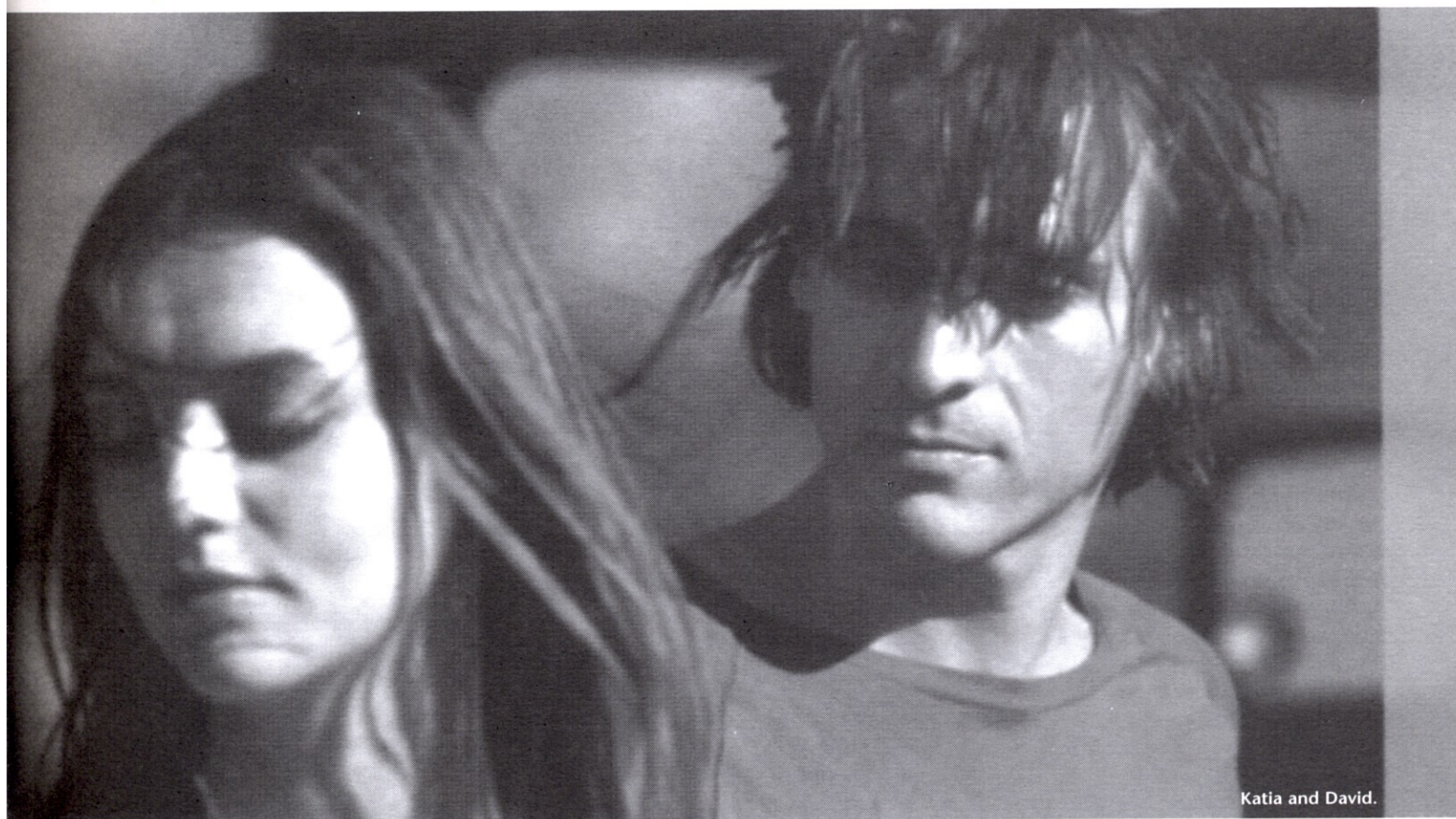
"In sum, then, the disciplines have simply rendered themselves incapable of approaching the problem of values because it is only when you get a thoroughgoing view of the ensemble of man in his full field of social relationships that value judgments become possible and compelling."

—Ernest Becker¹

I. "Value" and Its Contexts

We live in a time in which western civilization has lost its overriding faith in its central Christian myth, by which meaning and value were automatically assured, and it remains to be seen whether this central myth will be replaced by any other(s), or whether it will be possible to live in the future without one (something which would be unique in the cultural history of our species). In his work on the origins of religion, Emile Durkheim argued that "God" can be defined as "society"; in other words, the source of meaning and value is only to be found in society as a whole. In modern times, at least from the beginnings of the Romantic movement, society has come to be viewed as an impediment to the freedom of the individual, something to be tolerated at best, and more likely something to be fought against. In classical narrative, Individual heroes originally function to save society from its enemies, but gradually become outsiders or "anti-heroes" whose relationship with society is disharmonious and often violent. The "community" generally comes to be perceived as mediocre, a precarious balance of contending self-interests, and vitality moves to the fringes, even while the outsider hero cannot avoid retaining in some form a parasitic relationship to it.

For a film-maker like Bruno Dumont, prevailing forms of unbridled individualism are exposed as disastrous in their implications and their effects. In *La vie de Jésus* (1997), his first feature, delinquent youths in provincial Belgium are convincingly portrayed as victims of what Durkheim called "anomie", the protagonist's behaviour moving from apathetic indolence to mindless violence, and it is significant that



Katia and David.

none of them, when confronted by a picture of Christ above a hospital bed, can identify the figure or know what it means. In his next film, *L'Humanité* (1999), Dumont creates, somewhat in the manner of Dostoevsky, a "holy fool" or Christ-like character who attempts to take the sins of others upon his own shoulders. This film sharply divided critics, many of whom found such a procedure risible. Certainly the film does foreground for a viewer the question of his or her system of beliefs. For sophisticated post-Christians (who, I suppose, comprise the majority of the film's audience), the protagonist might easily be dismissed as absurd and ridiculous. Not sharing Dostoevsky's (and Dumont's?) heterodox messianic Christianity, and not being converted to it by viewing the film, I was nevertheless not sniggering when I watched it (although others were, a few walking out and a few shouting "you're so stupid!" at the protagonist). It seemed a fully serious attempt to instil value into a world which had lost all sense of direction, in which "everything is permitted" (here, the central event presented to us from the outset is child murder, for which it initially seems the protagonist could be guilty, until he ultimately assumes responsibility for it after the actual perpetrator has been exposed).

The problem with criticising western civilization from a Christian perspective is, it seems to me, that Christianity itself gave rise to its own eclipse by not providing an inclusive enough meaning for all its members. Anthropological research into the origins of religion has provided evidence that our central myth (and its precursors) was constructed upon an earlier one, and that the change coincided with a movement from a hunter-gatherer to an agricultural economy. In hunter-gatherer society God is the totem animal with which the tribe identifies in its rituals. Divinity is an attribute of humanity in its collective ritual activity (an activity which posits an identification with the hunted animal). This ritual activity creates society (language, symbolism, meaning) and thereby liberates us from our pre-moral animality: "it allows man to be consummately individual and fully social at the very same time...thus we see how ritual, even though it builds man into the world, also liberates him: when he actively creates his own meanings he rises above both the animal condition and the passive condition of an everyday role participant in culture."² Christianity, especially as it developed, becoming ever increasingly symbolic as its ritual dimension lost its potency (itself a consequence of the supersession of hunter-gathering), tended to turn its members—as

members of a symbolic community—into “the passive condition of an everyday role participant” in a “culture” which was no longer collectively created, but imposed by a minority (originally shamans, then priests, then mandarins latterly possessed by an economic bias) onto a majority whose lives were taken up with increasingly meaningless economic activity. In these circumstances culture becomes subordinated to economics, with “great” works now increasingly being defined as those which make the most profit rather than those which make the most meaning.

We arrive here more or less at the position we find ourselves in today, where a few solitary individuals (we call them artists) struggle to create works which “actively create meanings”, both for themselves and their recipients. This is why no film of value can be viewed without regard to its social context. I do not so much mean the context of the economic conditions by which it came to be made (although this can be useful, if not always easy, to know) but the more general social context of life in western civilization at the beginning of the 21st century AD (between 100-150,000 years after human culture began). As E.R. Leavis was fond of pointing out, there is no such thing as “purely literary values”. The same applies to any art.

II. *Twentynine Palms*

Twentynine Palms (2003), Bruno Dumont’s most recent film, begins in America, on the outskirts of the Californian conurbation, and moves gradually deeper into the desert. We are on the freeway, inside a gleaming Hummer (the most “gas guzzling” of all sports utility vehicles, or SUVs, themselves the most “gas guzzling” of all automobiles, themselves currently one of the worst polluters of the planet). The driver is seated alone (we view him from behind); there is a sense of isolation and alienation: the sounds of the other vehicles on the freeway, their blackened windows (no doubt sold to promote “privacy” rather than “isolation”, just as SUVs sell well because they appear safe or impenetrable, crucial factors in a society which collectively values the individual above all else—which also makes them isolating). A white van with blackened windows overtakes the Hummer (it could be the same van that reappears at the end of the film); the driver, who is wearing dark glasses, glances at it (the Hummer’s own windows appear tinted rather than completely blacked out). His mobile phone rings and we get the impression from his laconic conversation that he is a photographer or location-finder, and that this is the reason for his driving into the desert for a few days. Whatever his exact role, in any case his tone of conversation does not give the impression that he is creatively fired by what he is doing.

There is a cut and we are surprised to see a young woman asleep at the back (her inert state here looks forward to what happens to her at the end of the film). The driver is not alone, only alone at the front of the car driving. He puts some red tape on the wheel, presumably as a safety precaution (to let him know if he is falling asleep or in some other way losing control—which is to happen later). Katia would seem to be his girl-friend and be French (later on, however, it seems that French is only her second language, spoken so that David can understand her; although she can speak some English too, and his French is not perfect by any means). He answers her in French (“It’s fine, my love”), being both generous and ungenerous. His generosity is in speaking in another language (although, as I have said, we find out later that French is not her native language either; since both actors refer to each other by their real Christian names, we can assume that Katia is actually Russian); his ungenerosity is displayed in the manner and the tone in which he speaks. This is somewhat difficult to define, and perhaps only cumulatively detectable. It is also, in itself, possibly a

quite accurate index of a person’s make-up. The tone here—combined with the overall impression he gives in the whole scene, especially the brief phone conversation with what seems to be a superior at work, who is a woman called Michelle (a fact which may be significant)—is just a little patronizing, a little smug—there are many other examples of it in the film, the most important of which are combined with an element of calculation.

I hope I have made it plain from a brief account of the opening of the film that the director is not imposing a ready-made set of values upon his material, or telling us what to think. He is simply showing us things, through which, if we really look, we can see a moral context for ourselves. In fact, most of the elements I have remarked upon I only picked up on a second viewing, a second viewing compelled by my experience of shock at the ending of the film, which made the ending the second time I saw it no less shocking but also more inevitable. David stops the Hummer, the first time to fill up with petrol, the second to look at some wind turbines (at Katia’s prompting), presumably as a possible location for the future shoot (which never actually takes place). Katia is particularly appreciative of the turbines, whose look and noise contrast with the nearby traffic. They look out of place in an unfamiliar way and the sound they make is strangely like some kind of animal. David echoes her sentiments, but not her tone (“it’s great... perfect!”). When she squats to urinate on the ground he turns his head but says “some day I want to see you pee.” On a first viewing this may suggest the couple share an intimate relationship that is admirably free of inhibitions. Seen again, it seems faintly ominous of what is to come, with David taking ever greater liberties. Katia smiles as she says “no”, and when she comes back to join him, David (not for the last time) holds her head between both his hands. Again, the second time this is seen it seems less innocent. The intensity of his gesture suggests an underlying possessiveness and even violence. Like his car, David inspires fear rather than love—but that does not mean that Katia does not love him, nor necessarily (although this is an understandable reaction on a viewer’s part) that she is foolish or wrong to love him.

Back in the Hummer the frame emphasizes the separation between David and Katia. She puts her hand on his to close the gap between them, and asks him (in French) what he is thinking. “Nothing”, he replies. She does not believe him. He gets annoyed: “I’m driving! What!?” She starts crying. He gets more angry. The scene ends. What are we to make of this? We get a sense that this is a couple that is not really joined together, perhaps like a number of other couples, calm and assured on the surface, but with fundamental problems that are not directly addressed. Katia wants David to share his thoughts with her and is upset that he won’t do so. In the following scene the problem which arises is complementary.

Katia and David get into the motel pool from opposite ends. On the soundtrack there is a distinct mix of disharmonious sounds: relentless traffic from the road adjoining the motel, mixed in with the sounds of crickets and grasshoppers; finally both are submerged in the sound of a police siren (presaging the final scene, when we see a police car but its siren is mute). Katia lies on her back with her face up, motionless; David looks at her from the pool edge, then there is a POV shot of his quiet advance toward her in the water, rather like that of an attacker or predator in a horror movie (it is not until we have seen the film through that we are able to surmise that what we have just seen is, indeed, a horror movie; it may owe a little here—as well as in other respects—to *Psycho*, which withholds its horrors until half way through, but I can’t think of any other that withholds them until the very last scenes). When he takes hold of her, she is clearly surprised and



Twentynine Palms: Katia Golubeva and David Wissak.





annoyed at being disturbed in this way. She asks if he loves her; he does not reply except by holding her and getting her to accede to his physical need (need or demand?) for sex: "Cock—penis—put it inside....inside!" She responds, crying out "Encore! Encore!" so we can assume that she is as needy for him physically as he is for her. They both sound like animals (because humans are animals, as well as something more); after which the scene fades to black.

I said the scene complements the previous one because of its focus on David's desires, which seem purely physical, animal. Whereas Katia had previously reached out to David in a deeper way, which includes the physical but goes beyond it. She is not anti-sex but at no point in the film does she initiate sex with David. Her question to him about love does not get answered. Instead he is too involved in an intense physical effort to reach orgasm. It may be relevant here to cite Sheila MacLeod's excellent study, *Lawrence's Men and Women*, in which she makes a number of observations about the difficulties involved in achieving manhood in a patriarchal society that prizes it above all else. When in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for example, the woman asks the man if he loves her, "he cannot bring himself to make any such admission because it would constitute a slur on his virility. Here is another glimpse into male neurosis: the male fear that the expression of emotion will unman." (3). MacLeod convincingly argues that Lawrence himself is partly caught up in patriarchal ideology, explaining his ambivalent attitude toward the female sex. As a novelist he identifies with them ("to write a novel is in itself an admission of uncertainty, of tentativeness": (4)—can the same be said of making a film, or writing a critical essay?) but as a man he needs to assert his superiority.

David needs to assert his superiority, and by doing this he is essentially the weaker character. The need to assert superiority in the human male can be explained both in biological and cultural terms: the biological fact that males have to achieve an erection in order to have intercourse; and the cultural fact that—in a patriarchal society—there is a constant pressure on the man to perform (in all senses of the word). In *Twenty-nine Palms* Dumont gives us no back-story to illuminate the background to David and Katia's relationship. One summary of the film says that Katia is David's "assistant", but I find no indication at all in the film as to what kind of job, if any, she has. She does not seem to have any social status at all (nor does she seem to own anything apart from the clothes she wears), which is perhaps the way David prefers things, especially as in his job he seems to be answerable to a female superior, something which can threaten a man's sense of "manliness".

In the following scene we view a series of night-time flash photos which we find that David is watching on the TV. He tells Katia it is an "art film" and "amazing": his use of superlatives is familiar from the scene at the wind turbines, and in both scenes the tone in which they are expressed goes against the ostensible meaning of the words. While Katia had uttered the word "fantastique" with conviction, there seems nothing behind David's use of the words, certainly not enthusiasm or sincerity.

The restaurant scene which follows most clearly indicates Katia's intrinsic superiority over David as a human being, a superiority which has nothing to do with social status or any of the outer signs of worth that the contemporary western world values most highly. David says he would like to order what the man on the opposite table is eating, but—out of a perverse pride and stubbornness—wants to "find it on the menu" rather than simply ask the man (or even the waitress) what it is. When the waitress arrives Katia asks her directly "What's that guy eating?" and after they are told David smiles at her and says "It's easy, yes?" in such a manner that he suggests that she has plucked up the courage to ask something which he never had any need to do. Whereas of course the truth is the reverse. David has projected his own fear and insecurity onto Katia, something which she does not question, since she simply has no interest in power. "Did I do something wrong?" David asks her, being quite unaware of the self-deception he has engaged in just so that he can retain the necessary sense of superiority. While Katia does not seem to care at all about being inferior in

the relationship she does get upset when David glances at a waitress who leaves to go off duty. David says "It's a normal reaction...to look at people" and (without any deeper knowledge) one can only agree. When Katia bangs her hands on the table in response we surely feel that this has not been the first occasion on which David has had a roaming eye (or perhaps more than just this), rather than conclude (as David may) that she is paranoid. Certainly the remainder of the film does not resolve the question, although it would give us no surprise to learn that David has been unfaithful to Katia (the foregoing comments made about "manliness" as something that has to be achieved, in contrast to "womanliness", which, as Sheila MacLeod points out, does not even exist as a word, may bring to mind the "Don Juan syndrome", the man who is insecure in his sense of manliness requiring constant validation from numerous female "conquests").

The following day the Hummer is seen moving away from the stationary camera, a scene that is repeated at the beginning of each new day except the last, in which it is seen moving toward the camera, indicating that the journey in the fêted wild west, worldwide symbol of freedom, in the vehicle that is marketed as a symbol of freedom par excellence, is in fact always already fated, or predestined, to end in the way it does. Again D.H. Lawrence is brought to mind: "Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west." (5). As we can probably anticipate, David speeds along with the Hummer (as if speed increases freedom instead of guzzling out more gas into the environment, thereby contributing to the long-term diminution of human freedom, and even human existence), and speaks to Katia in a tone which mixes sheepishness with contempt ("over and down...joshua trees...all you like"). Once they leave the road David condescendingly offers Katia the chance to drive. She accepts, but quickly shows herself to be an unskilled driver. David no doubt knows this and is happy that she is inferior to him in this way (in other words he has his own motives for allowing her the chance to drive and is really thinking more of himself than of her when he gives her the wheel), until he gets annoyed when her driving gets too wayward. "Don't scratch the car!" he shouts. When he gets out and finds the car is indeed scratched, and says they must fix it with some wax, Katia laughs spontaneously. To her the Hummer is only a car, something that fundamentally does not matter (in contrast to a human being or an animal: this scene has its mirror image a little later on).

David allows Katia to continue driving, but holds onto the wheel as well. Soon she stops, admiring a mesa in the landscape. David approaches her and starts to remove her dress. "No, no", she says gently. "Not here", and they walk off toward the mesa. We get the sense from this that sex for David is a purely animal desire that can be separated from any context, while for Katia it is something that can—and should—matter, for which a context is desirable (not just this body but this person, not just anywhere but this place). They walk to the bottom of the mesa, where David tries unsuccessfully to penetrate her from behind, whereupon she laughs, not unkindly. He is not so amused. "I've been here any-ways", he mutters under his breath (incidentally implying that Katia's body is simply there for him to explore and get gratification from, without any thought of her own needs and desires). Katia, not at all upset by what he has just said, defuses the situation by implying that it is her fault ("I'm too dry, my love."); this enables David to laugh a little too, albeit slightly nervously (at least now he knows that his manliness is still secure). Both completely naked apart from the black boots David wears, they climb the mesa. In a wider context, David's boots assume a slightly sinister (as well as

comical) aspect. When the couple reach the top and lie down on the bare rock, the moment does seem harmonious, a respite from tension as well as a suggestion of the human continuum with the natural world. The black boots, however, sound a jarring note. David is generally linked to the colours red and black (the T-shirt he has been wearing, the colours of the Hummer) and I do not think it is too far-fetched to suggest that we are invited to think of the Nazis in this context (the jackboots as well as the colours—the colour white assumes significance when the white van with blacked out windows appears again at the end of the film). By being naked David is effectively "unmanned" in a cultural sense. Katia touches his genitals and though he does not draw her away he says "reserve" (translated as "sheltered" in the subtitles, but also with the connotations of the English word "reserved", meaning "private, off limits"). The fact that David is still wearing the boots is not merely a casual detail (in this film, as I hope this essay demonstrates, hardly any detail seems casual; nor is the fact that there is an emphasis on detail itself casual, since it helps to increase the shock, as well as the inevitability, of the ending). In one sense they make him look comical, ridiculous, much more so than if he were completely naked (the overhead shot highlights them); in another sense they remind us that he is unable to "unman" himself completely, that even in such apparently ideal conditions he is unable to let go of his cultural "baggage", or, rather, the "baggage" that goes with patriarchal ideology. Katia has no such trouble, as she lies outside the patriarchal structure (a fact which makes her both free yet powerless). There is a cut to the overwhelming brightness of the sun, which may or may not be indicative of a possible transcendence. Down below they are burning (as Katia has earlier indicated it is dangerous to lie down in the sun—instead of escaping to nature human beings may soon have to resort to escaping from nature because of their contamination of the environment: though the concept both of "escaping to" and "escaping from" nature seems somewhat dubious when examined for long). "It's beautiful here", she says. David gets up. "Let's go!" "I don't want to go!", she responds, laughing as she does so, the laughter attempting to mollify the sentiments she expresses, which contravene David's direct imperative. He laughs too, but makes sure she complies with his wish to leave. The camera stays at the foot of the mesa as we watch the two of them walk slowly back to the Hummer, the laughter continuing yet somehow sounding like crying too (an ambiguous effect which is to occur again).

The close up of bright sunlight is followed at the beginning of the next scene by a close up of cloud. There is a sound of distant thunder. In the motel pool, Katia is worried ("We have to leave. It's dangerous."). She is right. Lightning is a real threat. But David does not merely disagree (which would be to concede too much to her). He tells her that she is wrong: "Absolutely not. It's not true." As before, he holds her head with both of his hands, a gesture which has violent undertones. If this potential for violence has not been expressed before, now it is. They both submerge—there is a pause of a few seconds—then they both surface and Katia shouts at him: "You're crazy!" Choking and crying, she swims away from him. "I didn't mean to do that, Katia", he responds, an attempt at an apology but an obvious lie, since whatever he did, he must have known what he was doing to her. As in the previous pool scene, he swims noiselessly toward her in a POV shot reminiscent of horror movies. When he then says "excuse moi" the tone again contradicts the meaning of the words. The apology, in other words, seems not to be a genuine expression of remorse but a calculated effect, a way to bring Katia round so that he can exploit her further. "You hurt me", she says. We can be in little doubt at this

point, looking on, that David has “crossed the line” in his behaviour toward Katia; although we have not seen exactly what has happened we can reasonably conclude that he has violated her; and I suppose we could be wondering why she is still staying with him (we may find out later). He pulls her back gently (but ominously) in the water, but before anything more happens they are disturbed by three boys entering the pool and falling into the water as they struggle with a ball. As they play or fight over the ball (play? fight? it’s impossible to say quite what is the most accurate term—and when seen a second time the scene might be said to prefigure the later scene where another, older group of three men intrude on the couple, the instrument of play in that scene—the baseball bat—being used unequivocally as an instrument of violence). Katia leaves the pool, David following her.

Back in their spare and anonymously appointed motel room (in which a landscape painting hangs over the bed), David is again watching the TV and perhaps “playing” with himself under the towel he is wearing. Katia comes out of the bathroom and asks what he is watching. It’s “The Jerry Springer Show”, in which a father is “confessing to his wife that he has slept with his daughter”. “The poor thing”, Katia says, referring to the mother. One would suppose here that she would be referring to the daughter; but that can be taken as read. The comment is another example of Katia’s sympathies and emotional involvement with others, while David seems to be looking at the TV merely as a way of passing the time. She looks at him and says revealingly, “You wouldn’t do that?” David is taken aback, saying she is mad, then turns back to the TV screen. It hardly needs saying that for Katia now (and the viewer) David may be a man who is capable of doing that (especially considering what he has just been doing while watching the TV). She puts her hands over her mouth as if to defend herself from the implications of what she has just said. Then we find that

she is actually laughing, as if to say to herself that the thought is ludicrous. A conflict seems to be going on inside her, not for the first time. She knows at some level she ought to leave David—but feels she cannot, because she loves him—also it may be that her options are somewhat limited (where could she go? what could she do? what, if any, money does she have?).

The following day David and Katia walk in the town to look for somewhere to eat, as well as buy some material to remove the scratches on the Hummer. As they walk along the semi-deserted streets, we hear in the background a Bach Orchestral Suite. It is impossible to locate the source of the music; it seems to be at once diegetic (since it is heard as if from a distance) yet unlocatable (the music remains at the same low volume as the camera follows David and Katia along several blocks). It is also highly unlikely in such an environment, and exerts an effect as startling as the diegetic Bach music heard in Jacques Demy’s California-set film from the late sixties, *The Model Shop*, which in fact contains the very same piece of music. In both cases the music suggests a yearning for something out of reach, a harmony which may or may not be defined in religious terms but which in any case is lost (hence the startling nature of the music’s occurrence). In *Twentynine Palms* the harmony of the music (which nobody except the viewer seems to hear) is juxtaposed both with the general ambience of the environment which David and Katia traverse, but also the incident that occurs when the pair cross the main street: a man slowly driving a red van stops and shouts obscenities at them. We get a sense here that there is a barely contained violence in the whole environment, a violence that seems closely related to ownership, possession and masculinity (the driver says, absurdly, that it’s “my road”).

When David and Katia stop at a cafe to order some ice-cream it seems for a moment that they have regained some sort of equilib-



rium. Katia jokes about David not fancying the waitress ("She's too tall"—perhaps subtly implying that David would feel threatened in his manliness by a woman who is physically taller than himself?); while David remarks on the marines who are stationed in the locality and which helps to give the film's title its nice ambiguity. The name "29 Palms" in itself suggests a natural environment; yet the actual place, as well as being well-known for its outstanding natural features such as the Joshua-tree park, is equally well-known for being the home of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, the world's largest marine base. The Marine Corps' motto is "The Few, The Proud", drawing attention to its elitist and patriarchal priorities. Although we never see a marine in the film (apart from the one, seen from behind, that David refers to in this scene) their presence is somehow all-pervasive, contributing to the atmosphere of latent (and sometimes not so latent) hostility, aggression and violence. "You wouldn't want me to shave my head like them?" David asks Katia. "If you do...I'll leave you", she laughs, in a line which assumes horrific irony by the end of the film. "You don't like marines?" he asks. "I do. They're really handsome." This remark annoys David. "What are you talking about?" he snaps. It seems a reasonable comment, if sharply expressed. What does Katia mean here? As usual, David's thoughts confine themselves to the external aspects of things. If she does not like his head shaved like a marine, why should she like marines, all of whose heads are shaved? It seems that Katia, apart from the fact that she likes David's hair (why shouldn't she find that attractive too?) may be making a distinction between the physical ("they're really handsome") and the underlying reality (the fact of being a marine, a cog in a machine dedicated to violence and power, the loss of individuality and humanity which this entails). The fact that David has introduced the topic suggests he has at some level identified with the marines—something that is borne out by his general behaviour and which is obscenely fulfilled at the end of the film. David's anger at Katia remains when she answers his question about the ice-cream ("Is it good?"). "It's not good...but it's good" she replies, smiling. Here Katia seems to be poking fun at David's question (she knows from his response to what she has just said about marines that he will be annoyed if she answers in this way), and also continuing her way of distinguishing between the particular and the general. In this case it might mean "the ice cream is no good, but it doesn't matter." This meaning would be consistent with her saying (in response to David's frustrated "You say things I don't understand!") "There's nothing to understand!" Katia is having fun, playing with language; while David is unable to deal with language (and the people who use such language) that is beyond easy definition and categorization. The whole of things lies beyond language, and the closest that language can come to express this truth is by paradox and self-contradiction. To anyone who is unable to operate in this dimension (the dimension of the general, beyond the personal) such language will only be interpreted as nonsensical. "I have no idea what you're saying", he tells her. "I love you", she says (whereby the force of the word "love" includes the personal in the general, the general in the personal). David responds by saying "I want you", as if clinching the point that he is only able to think concretely, of how things relate to him in the here and now. There is little doubt that Katia's more selfless, abstract sense of what matters is far more valuable than David's; it may also be the case that it is a more common feminine trait (the female's child-bearing capacity making her view things in the long term as well as the short term, her very biology implying that "no man is an island"—whereas men often have to learn this, often through women); on the other hand there can be little doubt that David's view corresponds to the prevailing view of the ruling

powers of the contemporary western world. We should hardly expect things to be otherwise, since David's self-centred, concrete sense of reality is closely related to patriarchal power structures, where "manliness" has to be defended and maintained by ever more "conquests" (as in the U.S. the humiliation of 9/11 has to be countered by the invasion of Iraq, which must have been happening at the time the film was being made—and which could invite an allegorical interpretation). Power actually resides in the hands of those who can only abuse it; whereas power ought (if there is to be any long-term future for the human species, which involves a sense of responsibility, an awareness of life beyond the confines of the self) to reside in the hands of those who refute it or who have absolutely no need for or interest in it.

The ice-cream scene is in many ways the crux of the film. Nowhere else are the differences between the two characters set down so plainly. It is followed by a sex scene in the motel room, in which the emphasis is placed upon David's subjective experience. He seems to be talking only to himself when he cries out "I'm coming, I'm coming", words which might express his sense of achievement at reaching orgasm—further confirmation of his "manliness", without reference to what Katia is experiencing (the sounds she makes could be screams of pleasure, could be moans of pain: it's impossible for me to say which); certainly pleasure and pain seem to be closely mixed, as does self-assertion and self-negation.

On the penultimate morning David carefully removes the scratches from the Hummer, while Katia has trouble closing the door of their room. David is pleased to lock it for her, and she strokes his hair, asking him what he puts in it. He does not answer her. Obviously this reference to hair reminds us of the ice-cream scene the previous day, and may suggest the way in which David is—at some unadmitted level of himself (which would explain why he does not answer her here)—responding to her own liking for his hair. If hair is contrasted with the shaved heads of the marines (in many traditional hunter-gatherer societies head-shaving is part of the male rite of passage from childhood to adulthood), it may be related to a sense of the man's feminine qualities. Being a man who seems emotionally committed to the ruling patriarchal ideology, David is understandably attracted by the marines; but this scene may show that he is also in need of Katia's love and approval, even though he consciously denies this and never tells her so. Again, there is a resemblance to a number of D.H. Lawrence's characters, in which men have "a desperate need for their women" and an "equally desperate need to deny the existence of any such needs" (6). David is less a one-dimensional portrait of the clichéd "macho" type than he may appear at first sight—if he were, we would find it difficult to explain why Katia stays with him. In her love for him she may be blind to his faults while also seeing through to his essential vulnerability, his need for her (by which I mean here something beyond the mere confirmation of his manliness), which he has not altogether repressed (hence the "feminine" touch of putting something in his hair).

The problem is that David is never fully able to acknowledge his own vulnerability in the film; for him, imbued as he is with orthodox masculine values, vulnerability is equated with weakness.

Once in the Hummer David speeds along, as if quickly wanting to bury the reference to his hair with a show of typical masculine prowess. Katia urges him to slow down; he does not; so she shouts "Stop!" He does so. He walks up to her outside, presumably with the intention of making love. But they are disturbed by a van with blacked out windows suddenly and unexpectedly passing by (they are in the middle of the desert): another omen. As on the previous

occasion, David lets Katia drive. After some difficulty (and laughter) involving the gear box, Katia asks "Can I?"

Some distance further on, David gets out and we are reminded that they have come to the desert to check out locations for a photo shoot. He crouches like a demon in front of a wide open expanse of rugged terrain and breathes heavily. It is as if the scale of the landscape wearies him ("794,000 acres", he says back in the Hummer, looking at the map), perhaps gives him a sense of futility: there is too much to take in; how can he begin to "capture" the landscape with his camera when there is simply so much of it (in *ST MAWR*, D.H. Lawrence refers to the desert as "the forever unpossessed country")? Nothing is said; but this seems to be the implication of the scene, implying the inherent effort and costs involved in attaining masculine control and definition of nature.

They stop outside an isolated homestead where there are two dogs (one three-legged). Katia is delighted and starts talking to the three-legged one ("You're a real dog!"). David makes a sarcastic comment ("I don't think they're going to understand your French, honey!") which betrays again a deeper sense of vulnerability—if the dog, even a three-legged one, is a "real dog", what does that make him as a man? As they drive away, he (presumably accidentally) hits the three-legged dog with the Hummer. They get out and see the dog lying on the ground whimpering. Katia shouts at David: "Do something! Call someone!" followed by the accusing remark (which she repeats): "You don't give a damn!" The dog gets up and limps away. David is pleased and comments vacuously ("See, it's good!") in a tone which matches his use of superlatives and is another symptom of his emotional atrophy, contrasting with Katia's emotional sincerity and directness.

As they drive off it seems for a moment as if this will be the last straw. But Katia comes round again, her accusation ("You have no heart....nasty man!") softened by her touching of him. The narrative becomes more elliptical from this point, as we cut to the end of another scene of sex (no doubt initiated by David), where Katia is pleasing him as he says (as before, only this time in French) "J'arrive!" She says "My love!" when her face is shown in close up positioned against his penis (hidden behind). The effect of this is incongruous yet also somewhat disturbing. Obviously her words are not referring to David's penis but to his whole person or being; but we get only a fragment of himself shown in the frame. Additionally, the tone of Katia's voice appears for the first time defeated and deflated. It's as if she knows now that the relationship is no good.

Certainly this interpretation is borne out by the following scene, in which Katia has locked herself in the bathroom while David impassively watches the TV (as he has done before). He goes up to the door and knocks on it loudly, losing his temper ("Open the fucking door! If I knew you were going to act like a fucking princess..."). He does not at all stop to think that maybe he is the cause of her now unresponsive behaviour. She opens the bathroom door, says she is "splitting" and he pushes her out. On the TV at this point we hear distinctly the sounds of James Stewart's voice (though we are not given a sight of the screen) and this may bring to mind some of his tortured portraits of masculinity in crisis from the 1950s cinema. David switches it off. Outside, Katia walks by the side of the road and runs behind a parked lorry as a car approaches. We do not see who is driving; perhaps she does. As in the pool scenes, David looks at Katia without her seeing him, moving up behind her. She spots him, walks away from him, then runs into his arms as the car drives past again ("Watch the car!" she shouts). As in a previous scene, we could interpret this (as no doubt David does) as a case of female paranoia. It's only a car driving past. And yet—it does seem to be the same car which has driv-

en past Katia two or three times. It is dark; she is alone. We begin to see the difficulties involved for a woman alone in the world (especially in the world as it is depicted in this film and especially for a young, attractive woman from a foreign country who may well be jobless and without money of her own) and that it may be safer for her to be in a relationship, even if a very unsatisfactory one, than for her to be on her own. She leaves David for another, unknown threat (though I think we can assume the driver of the car is male), and rushes back to him for protection. He is no doubt flattered but also uncomprehending in the face of this behaviour (since for him it contradicts her having just left him): "You're not well!", he says. She picks up on the patronizing tone immediately—"Fuck off!" she says, and walks away from him. He follows, and they struggle in the middle of the road. It's fighting, not playing, though there's no question of who is the stronger in physical terms. It is at this point that she breaks into her mother tongue (Russian), rather than English or French: an indication that she is really on her own, and knows it. They walk back in single file to the motel room, filmed in long shot in profile (in contrast to the earlier views of them walking in the street together, where they have been side by side and viewed from the front). This is followed by a high angle shot of the two of them facing each other, breathing heavily. After a long pause she slowly sinks her head into his. But this is far from being an embrace; it's an acknowledgment by Katia that he has got the power, that she would leave him but she cannot, that men everywhere in this environment have got the power, and there seems to be no escape from it.

The opening shot of the last sequence of the film, in keeping with certain shots that have gone before (especially shots of a van/car with blacked out windows), where a low-angled stationary camera monitors the Hummer coming slowly toward it, communicates an impending sense of doom, though it is up to the viewer whether or not this should be interpreted in metaphysical terms (I happen to think that the fictional events in the film can be viewed as both avoidable—because the result of human agency—and inevitable—because of the ideological system to which the man is committed, and from which the woman seems powerless to escape.). The white van appears in front of the Hummer, stops, then drives on. "It scares me", Katia says, as if she has registered its presence before. David says nothing: it's hardly manly to own up to being afraid. Further on, when the Hummer gets stuck in a rut, Katia wants to turn back but he dismisses the suggestion, implying that they must carry on with the job of location-finding (even though by this stage in the film we are left with no sense that this means anything at all). In any case, turning back is not "manly". Just at the moment when she reaches out to hold him again, the horrific climax ensues. The white van bumps them from behind, forcing even David's Hummer to come to a halt. Two men grab him, one beating him with a baseball bat; while another grabs Katia and strips her (but does nothing more, apart from hold her away from David). After being beaten, David is raped by the head-shaven man who has been holding him. Katia cries like an animal as she tries to break free from her captor when she sees what is happening; while the man's face, shown in close-up, expresses not pleasure so much as agony as he commits the rape. The men leave as quickly and suddenly as they have arrived; Katia crawls slowly toward David in the sand, and we hear him weeping (for the only time in the film), his head buried in his hands. To say this scene is a disturbing one is something of an understatement. We are free to interpret its meaning on more than one level. Literally, it may simply be a case of three men with time on their hands having spotted the Hummer and deciding to vent their envious feelings on its owner (though note they do not steal it afterwards); more poetical-

ly, we could see the scene as David's nemesis, a just (though excessive) punishment for the insensitive way he has treated Katia throughout the film. If he is clearly violated, at many times during the previous couple of days he has violated her, only more subtly. As mentioned earlier, in an allegorical sense this could possibly be read as the revenge of Europe against the new imperialist America—except the attackers appear to be white American males, and to claim they are at some level projections from the European Katia's "id" would, I feel, be stretching things (and go against her instincts for defusing violence).

Back in the motel room, Katia says that they must call the police. David says "no". It is clear that his masculinity would be too threatened by having to reveal what has happened to him to anyone else. Katia comes back from buying a pizza and we see in passing an elderly couple arrive at the motel and unload their belongings. At first sight this detail seems merely incidental, a welcome return to "normality" after the extremity we have just gone through. On reflection, however, this "normal" couple only unsettles things even more, since they do not really appear to be enjoying themselves, rather barely tolerating each other's presence. Their inclusion in the film quietly underlines one of its themes, the opposition of the "couple" to, or its alienation from, any larger sense of society, something which is conducive both to social breakdown and to the breakdown of the "couple" (since without a wider sense of sociality, personal and interpersonal attempts to generate meaning by themselves are inevitably fragile; one of the best ways may be to create a work of art). This could also be related to the sense of sterility in David and Katia's relationship—her own earlier reference to being "dry", the desert location, the general absence of children (apart from the disruptive poolside youths), the enclosed pain-pleasure dynamic of the sex scenes: in this regard Raymond Durnat's brief notes on *Psycho* as a "sterility tragedy" are suggestive (7).

Katia returns to the room, finds the bathroom door locked, waits until it is opened and is savagely, repeatedly stabbed by a head-shaven David (a reversal of *Psycho*, in which the victim is in the bathroom, though in both the killer is in disguise, problematizing masculine identity). Indeed, on a first viewing it is not obvious if the man who emerges from the bathroom is David or his attacker; certainly he seems deliberately to have turned himself into his attacker, possibly as a way (the only way?) of regaining his masculine identity. It is not enough to kill Katia, however; since David is also a witness to his own emasculation, he has to end his own life as well, and in the final scene we see him lying dead, face down in the desert, wearing only his boots (as before: with the same comical and sinister implications), while a solitary policeman is arguing on the phone with his colleagues. One of them seems to be having marital problems, as he is told to "stop talk(ing)" to his wife "and get me somebody out here now!"

It is surely one of the most desolate endings in cinema. The overhead shot of David, the Hummer and the policeman walking around at a little distance from the scene (not wanting to stay too close) may not suggest the nihilistic vision of E.M. Forster's Mrs Moore (which seems to correlate more with David's view, as we have seen him several times dumbly look out at the blank enormity of the landscape before him just as she has encountered the blank enormity of the Marabar Caves) so much as a division between nature and man (as opposed to woman as well as to other species perhaps?), a division that it may or may not be possible to heal, only to acknowledge, become aware of, contemplate.

Perhaps this is the value that the film holds for us, as we try to come to terms with its horrific ending, an ending which

clarifies much of what has gone before (and which, I would suggest, necessitates a second viewing of the film, though for a reason very different from those currently fashionable Hollywood productions that bear the intellectual pretensions of a "twist" ending): awareness—awareness of what we have seen, and awareness of what has caused it. The source of the horror would seem to be something pervasive in the social structure, a structure that promotes hostility, violence and aggression in men (not just David), which is only exacerbated (rather than relieved) by sexual contact with women (pleasure and pain, sex and violence appear closely connected, and from here it is only a step toward murder). Obviously, it would be good to think that it is the social structure, rather than the male psyche per se, which is at fault (and the fact that the film is the work primarily of one man gives some reason to hope that this is indeed the case). Ernest Becker has called this structure a "structure of evil", in which everything is being separated from everything else. What evidently needs to be done is to establish a definition of what it means to be human, which involves an understanding of how we became human in cultural terms (something which was being addressed by anthropologists up until the time of the First World War, and whose work has only recently been extended by contemporary anthropologists such as Chris Knight); as a corollary of this, we would have what Becker calls a "unified theory of alienation"—since it is evident that the fragmented social structure of contemporary western civilization, with its emphasis on the individual as the chief source of value, is an anomaly in terms of the history of cultural humanity.

By presenting a female as one of his protagonists for the first time (though in her empathy—and in her ability to communicate by touch—Katia relates to Pharaoh in *L'Humanité* in a way comparable to the way in which David might be said to relate to Freddy—who also shaves his head—in *La vie de Jésus*), Dumont foregrounds sexual politics in an urgent way. By her love Katia attempts to rescue David from his ideological prison of what it means to be a man (not that she would define what she is doing in this way, or even claim that she is "doing" anything); it does not (cannot?) work, and when he is suddenly, brutally "unmanned" his identity cannot sustain the loss. Maybe if he were to view the film he is acting in David could become aware of the need to change; but as is the case with other works, those who are most in need of them are those who are least likely to encounter them, and to resist any awkward implications if and when they do so. Females viewing the film, on the other hand, might come to, or be confirmed in, the realization that female power can only become effective when it works in solidarity with other females; Katia, unfortunately, because of her concentrated empathy with David, tends to overlook this possibility, with fatal consequences.

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Notes

1. Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil* (New York: George Braziller 1968), 386.
2. *Ibid.*, 214.
3. Sheila MacLeod, *Lawrence's Men and Women* (London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1985), 245.
4. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
5. D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin Books 1971 (1923), 12.
6. MacLeod, 59.
7. Raymond Durnat, *A Long Hard Look at 'Psycho'* (London: British Film Institute 2002), 226–27.

FROM WITHIN

Music in the Style of Jean Renoir

BY ALEX CLAYTON

A solitary flute breathes over a pastoral scene. A nymph frolics across the stage. A pipe-playing, vine-clothed, middle-aged satyr bounds in pursuit, the silence of his steps belying his portly frame. This is the summer daydream of Monsieur Lestingois, a Parisian bookseller whose extramarital affair with his young maid is here, in these opening moments of *Boudu Saved From Drowning* (*Boudu Sauvé des Eaux*, Jean Renoir, 1932), envisioned in mythological garb. Lestingois' entrance, stage-left, may seem to 'source' the music we hear: an airy melody, ungrounded by any identifiable tonic note and unblemished by any background noise so as to evoke a certain lightness of being, far from the repressive inhibitions of bourgeois life. With a histrionic gesture, however, Lestingois-as-satyr flings away his pipe, upsetting the impression that the song

The Lestingois; Boudu, Anne-Marie



emanates from it. The music now seems perhaps to rise from the theatre pit—that is, from an imagined space within the fantasy—as Lestingois catches his pretty nymph and makes to kiss her. Before he can do so, the image dissolves to the interior of Lestingois' home and bookshop, and the flute moves into its main melody, fainter now and quite muffled; it whispers on as Monsieur Lestingois, now dressed as a Parisian bookseller, paternally embraces his beaming Anne-Marie and utters a flowery ode to his nymph-come-maid. The muted sound quality might hint at a distant offscreen source, but in character the music seems more non-diegetic: correlating neatly with the poetry so that the melody comes to a close as Lestingois rounds off his verse; complementing the warm composition and gently spoken verse to accentuate the tenderness of Lestingois' affections, the aural equivalent of soft-focus. As a second rendition of the melody commences, the film cuts to a shot of a flute-playing neighbour at a balcony window, finally furnishing the music with a physical source (albeit a relatively indeterminate one: the precise location of the balcony in relation to the bookshop is never disclosed). Yet as the solo continues at constant volume over establishing shots of the bookshop, the silencing of all other diegetic sound bestows upon the flute an aura of omniscience. Cars and buses trundle noiselessly by, but the flute sings out, clean and bright. We return to the balcony where the player halts, mid-melody. A car horn punctures the emptiness left by the flute, and as the sounds of the street fill the air, the flautist briskly fastens his window and shuts himself inside.

This description of the opening sequence of *Boudu* is meant to signal something of the complexity of the musical soundtrack's arrangement, in which a single flute solo is heard variously—and sometimes at once—as diegetic and non-diegetic, physical and ethereal, imagined and real. The use of music here achieves a fluidity of tone and effect that is characteristic of Renoir's style, a style that on occasion has itself been likened to music.¹ Yet the role of music in Renoir's films has generally been underappreciated in critical accounts which have tended to concentrate on predominantly visual features such as the director's use of a mobile camera and long takes, his elaborate staging in depth and sensitive handling of action and gesture. This article hopes to redress the balance somewhat by highlighting and exploring the sophistication of the use of music in Renoir's style, considering in turn three Renoir films from the 1930s that crucially draw upon the unobtrusive power of diegetic music: that is, music that is heard to arise from within the time and space of the film's action.² In many instances diegetic music works, in collaboration with other more celebrated aspects of the Renoir style, to articulate rather complex understandings of characters and themes with a real deftness of touch. The multiple shifts in the character and perceived source of the flute in the opening sequence of *Boudu*, for example, do more than amount to mere playfulness: such shifts challenge our sense of 'inside' and 'outside' and so complicate relations between fantasy and reality. Lestingois' mythological fantasy is touched by pragmatic concessions on the part of the dreamer to the unreality of his dream: the too-plain artifice of the setting, with its plaster columns nearly toppled by Lestingois' lumbering stride; the gesture of discarding the pipe as if resigned to facing facts, even in the midst of fantasy. Conversely, the film's presentation of external reality is one in which a documentary-style montage of the Rive Gauche shopfront is coloured by the magical timbre of its accompanying flute. Fantasy is informed by reality, reality inflected by fantasy. Yet when the flute stops, the switch from otherworldly music to everyday noise (and the concomitant shutting of the balcony windows) reveals the bourgeois inclina-

tion to *seal off* the outside world, to cloak it in mythology and music, to retreat into theatre and daydream. Indeed, whilst the muffled flute heard in Lestingois' chamber gives an indication that outside sounds *can* penetrate the walls of his residence, the noise of traffic and vendors, for instance, are rarely heard during interior scenes. The result is to mimic Lestingois' bourgeois seclusion by creating an aural boundary between the unpredictable commotion of the urban throng and the ordered haven of a bourgeois bookshop.

The boundary is breached when, without explanation, Monsieur Lestingois rushes outside to rescue a drowning tramp and offers him a place to stay. The act is ostensibly altruistic; in fact, as a rather token gesture, it points more pertinently to Lestingois' fantasy of neatly reconciling public and private spheres by 'bringing the outside inside'—an attempt first implied by his incorporation of a neighbour's flute recital into his innermost dreams (which themselves expediently imagine a clandestine affair clothed in the respectable garments of a theatrical staging). But the conviction that Boudu, with his rough manners and hearty appetite, both alimentary and sexual, can live in perfect harmony with a reputable bourgeois couple proves rather wishful thinking. Lestingois' attempt to domesticate Boudu is a socially-sanctioned experiment to determine if bourgeois mores can accommodate such raw physicality. Towards the end of the film, Lestingois has taken it upon himself to arrange a formal marriage between Boudu and Anne-Marie, rejoicing that "for once we have been able to conform to the morals of the time and respect the laws of divine nature". The associations of the flute most powerfully convey this wish for legitimation when its voice is heard, on numerous occasions, over views of Parisian churches, speaking of Romantic pastoralism and sensuality alongside images evoking Christian morality and asceticism. In their wistful beauty, such occasions picture the seductiveness of Lestingois' dream of a harmony between carnal desire and social propriety.

We hear the flute at several other points throughout the film, most commonly over visual montages that mark a narrative ellipsis. After Lestingois has offered Boudu a place to stay, we hear the flute theme over a long shot of Notre Dame at night. A shot 'sourcing' the flute player at his window late at night is followed by an image of a cat prowling on a roof, the light now signalling that dawn has arrived. The leap forward in time, without any break in the melody, extends the flute's magical effect by its seeming to exist both inside and outside time and space. The theme continues over a series of tableaux sketching the residents of the house at dawn: Madame Lestingois swooning in her sleep, perhaps yielding to the pleasures of an erotic dream; Anne-Marie absent-mindedly sucking a fingernail in anticipation of her morning lover; while Monsieur Lestingois patiently sits in bed, waiting to sneak downstairs to his pretty nymph. The sound of the flute softly gathers together into a hymn these three silent images of private desire.

Temporally 'framing' this montage are two images of a restless Boudu, fidgeting between sweaty sheets, hankering for a firm park bench and a cool breeze. The associations of the flute theme that accompanies these images marks out Boudu's difference from the others by his very absence of desire. Indeed, throughout the film, while Boudu is clearly seen to possess a hearty sexual *appetite*, he could hardly be described as the subject of *desire*, any more than his sudden inclination for sardines could be described as a heartfelt yearning for fish. Boudu is content, if unreflectively so, precisely because he has no desire. While Lestingois' apparently whimsical fantasies result from the

entrenched dissatisfaction endemic to his class, Boudu's brand of freedom is never curtailed by such longing. In this respect, Lestingois' romanticised summation of Boudu at the end of the film, after Boudu has leapt / fallen from the marriage boat, strikes at least a note of truth: Boudu "follows the current", never driven to try swimming upstream. This is the nature of his freedom. But this kind of driftwood-liberty has a price. It fosters a susceptibility to being carried off in any direction. Luck, fate and impulse determine Boudu's existence. By contrast, for most of us, desire serves as a necessary anchor to one's everyday life—motivating decisions, shaping identity, providing hope. As Lestingois notes in reply to Anne-Marie's cheeky pronouncement that she will be "thinking about tonight": "Expectation is an indispensable condiment for dreary daily chores".

Perhaps just such a sentiment is present in Anne-Marie's thoughts as she sweetly sings 'Les Fleurs du Jardin', whilst absent-mindedly polishing Monsieur's prized telescope. The song begins:

*"Les fleurs du jardin
("The flowers of the garden
Chaque soir ont du chagrin.
Each evening are sorrowful
Oui, mais dès l'aurore
Yes, but from dawn
Tous leurs chagrins s'évaporent..."
All their sorrows evaporate...")*

In blithe expectation of her dawn pleasures, this young flower cheerily gets on with her dreary daily chores whilst singing this sprightly ditty to herself. Monsieur Lestingois enters, commanding the telescope to ogle the ankles of respectable ladies passing in the street. As we partake in his voyeuristic pastime—or, at least, see what he sees—Anne-Marie amateurishly pokes out the rest of 'Les Fleurs du Jardin' on the household's dusty old piano. The visual accompaniment, through the telescope, associates the musical theme with Lestingois' mild-mannered lechery, whilst the tone of naivety that results from the single-fingered tune, with its odd botched note and uneven tempo, makes Lestingois' attentions seem all the more crude. (A fine example of Renoir's capacity to allow the viewer a perspicacious stance towards characters even as that viewer shares an aspect of their subjective viewpoint.) As Anne-Marie chirps a second verse, the upbeat lyrics, continuing to praise nature's powers of self-renewal, strike a rather ironic note as she wipes the dust from an ornamental collage of stuffed birds. Moreover, they seem incongruous to the urban landscape we view through the telescope, suggesting in their affinity with Lestingois' dewy-eyed Romanticism his blindness to the reality of what he sees outside.

Ann serves as a diegetic *leitmotiv* of the secret relationship between master and maid. Lestingois later sings this song to himself as he tidies up after Boudu, with the implication that he is thinking about Anne-Marie to relieve his mind from the tensions building in the household. His rendition of the song also betrays his mild jealousy and hunch that Boudu, no doubt as part of nature's course, might be starting to lure away Anne-Marie with his "fresher flute" (—surely not very fresh!). Boudu also sings this song, mimicking Lestingois, on completion of a slap-up meal, presumably in celebration of his newfound lordliness, having mastered dinner etiquette and the problem of salt spillage. Having heard it bandied about by Lestingois and Anne-Marie, whom he knows are having an affair, Boudu's rendition of this song in front of Madame is also a teasing allusion to the relationship, giving

Lestingois good reason to allow the tramp a generous handful of cigars. In addition, Boudu's performance might suggest his own plans on Anne-Marie; after all, this bookseller seems willing to share everything! In these ways, the song functions as a tacit means of communication between the three characters. After Lestingois has stepped in to protect Anne-Marie from Boudu's lusty horseplay and sent him off to the barbers, he returns to the front room piano and broodingly picks out the melody of "Les Fleurs du Jardin". His own generosity towards Boudu has placed an obstacle in the way of his relationship with his maid—the tramp can't keep his mouth shut—and his pensive recital of the theme in this setting is a reminder of Anne-Marie's cheerful rendition, in simpler times, before Boudu arrived on the scene. The melody, with its staccato hops between notes, calls for a breeziness that Lestingois cannot at this moment muster. When Anne-Marie joins him by the piano, they talk quietly of their mutual discontent whilst both gazing down at the keys, running fingers silently over the surface of the keyboard. Anne-Marie longingly prods at treble C; Lestingois answers with three lingering C notes in the bass. The reciprocal balance of this double octave gap speaks secret volumes of tender affection and thwarted desire.

The piano's very presence in the house has already been connected to Lestingois' sexual frustration. In the scene with the telescope, when Anne-Marie asks him why they own a piano that nobody plays, he half-sardonically answers: "Because we're respectable people." Anne-Marie's subsequent performance might be seen as an attempt to act out her dream of bourgeois propriety. But, like the Lestingois marriage, the piano is a mere façade of respectability, growing dustier by the day. Only Anne-Marie plays his piano these days. The instrument performs the function of an innuendo, but one that hints at a sad truth. Both Monsieur and Madame are frustrated in their marriage; they sleep in separate rooms; they have nothing to say to each other. In one telling gesture, Madame pulls a face of mild disgust as she wipes a line of dust from the piano's music stand, and closes the lid of the keyboard.

Madame's feelings of dissatisfaction and sexual frustration are discernible in her every gesture. Fed up with the stuffy existence she has chosen for herself, she sulks away in her boudoir, lounges on her silk-strewn bed and primly files her nails. Suddenly the tinny sound of a street barrel organ enters through the window. Madame's reaction is magical, combining features of childlike glee, quiet abandon and erotic pleasure. She stops filing; her arms fall loosely to her sides as she listens; a girlish smile appears on her face. The enchanting melodic line, spiralling upwards, seems to fill her with life, temporarily releasing her from her mundane existence. The grinder's uneven tempo, adding to the music's unsophisticated charm, entices her from her bed to the window and a view of the outside world. As a shot of the barrel organ displays the object of her fascination, the absence of traffic noise alongside the music suggests both a romanticised listening and the projection of her own desire. Bored and dissatisfied with her respectable bourgeois life, the lure of the street—with its bawdy banter and simple pleasures—is all but embodied in the mechanical energy of the barrel organ. To put it crudely, Madame fancies a bit of rough. As she stands by the window and closes her eyes, we cut to the barber sign and Boudu jauntily making his way back. The undiminished continuation of the sourced music over these images that seem to exist outside of its range carries the implication that they form part of Madame's private thoughts, even as we understand the shot as objectively depicting a concurrent event. The blend of desirous imagination and objective reality in this single shot suggests that the generalised object of Madame's longing has now acquired human form, one that embodies all the vigour and vul-

garity she feels lacking from her life: Boudu the tramp. The music woos her for him.

Moments later, as Madame finally acquiesces to Boudu's animal force, an intentionally incongruous piece of music heralds her seduction. As the unlikely couple fall out of frame, the camera picks up and moves in towards a framed print on Madame's wall that depicts a cavalry officer blowing a military trumpet to signal an advance; as, on the soundtrack, a single trumpet bombastically blares out the opening few bars of a celebratory fanfare. The comic effect is achieved through the bizarre correspondence between image and sound in conjunction with the music's brassy inappropriateness to the situation. This combination of tenuous connection and striking incongruity heralds the mismatched sexual union between the reputable Madame Lestingois and this stinky old tramp. The print had previously been noticeable in the background when Madame had retired to her chamber in a sulk; associated with her pent-up frustration, this sudden rousing of the soldier's trumpet now serves as a suitably droll metaphor for Madame's feelings of sexual release. Yet the fanfare performed is not a chivalrous military flourish. Instead what issues is a ridiculous honky-tonk tune more in keeping with the fairground than either the battlefield or the bedroom.

With the single trumpet soon joined by other brass instruments, the opening phrase comes to an end and we abruptly cut to a shot of the street where a brass band begins the second musical phrase of the same melody, marching in honour of Lestingois' selfless rescue from the water of the very man now having it away with his wife. The public salute to bourgeois respectability seems particularly ironic at this juncture. With the sourcing of the music to the brass band, a triumphant tribute to Lestingois' altruism seems to celebrate Madame's own reckless abandon. The disjointed continuance of the melody, with its abrupt shift in sound quality as we cut from boudoir to boulevard, carries the sense of a mere masquerade of consistency between private and public life.

The 'clean' sound of the fanfare's opening phrase, and the delayed disclosure of its source, relates this use of music to the flute heard earlier over Lestingois' daydream. In each case, the 'filtered' sound quality, characterised by the absence of background noise and so suggestive of selective hearing, identifies the assimilation of an outside element into a private realm of fantasy and desire, much like the incorporation of Boudu into the Lestingois household. More than simply attending and expressing characters' thoughts and feelings, music is actually *used* by members of the household to voice unspoken urges and articulate matters of fantasy and frustration. Such musical sublimation is, of course, alien to Boudu. Our first and last encounters with the tramp find him gruffly singing to himself, the perfect image of contentment. Here his untroubled guttural growl strikes a significant contrast with the wandering melody and mellifluous tone of the flute, perfectly evoking his blithe self-sufficiency in contrast to Lestingois' wistful longing. Removed from the dissatisfactions of bourgeois life, Boudu has no need of instrumentation.

In *Boudu Saved From Drowning*, music is less an accompaniment to everyday lives than an active participant in the articulation of feeling and identity, fantasy and freedom. The range of ways in which music is actively used in *Grand Illusion* (*La Grande Illusion*, 1937)—to entertain and divert, to facilitate a prison break, to express allegiance, to offer a friendly hand—similarly testifies to the significance of its place in human lives. In both films, the cir-





La Grande Illusion

culatation of music among characters draws connections between them, yet the differential *use* of music draws telling distinctions. In *Grand Illusion*, the use of music works to explore the film's principal theme of boundaries.³ As the divisions of class, race, nationality—along with the more palpable borders of prison walls—so prominently preside over lives of the characters in *Grand Illusion*, music serves both as a means of demarcation and an opportunity for traversal of those boundaries.

Two sequences are notable for their presentation of a rousing, jingoistic use of music. Both depict celebrations of the taking of the key fort of Douaumont (first by the Germans, and then upon reoccupation by the French) and both sequences emphasise the divisive potential of song. In the first, an assembly of victoriously chanting German soldiers inside one building is juxtaposed with a small but indignant group of French prisoners gathered in the window of an adjacent building. A courtyard between the two buildings is patrolled by a tipsy German guard, who sings along with the triumphant anthem as he promenades across the yard. The camera movement that follows his path emphasises his territorial demarcation of the courtyard, in the way he casually transports the song outside of the main celebrations and across the yard to taunt the French prisoners. The film cuts back inside the German quarters and the music is heard more robustly; the camera arcs around the space to show the singers and players and, in imitation of the uplifting, *rallentando* ending, tilts upwards to settle on framed portraits of the Kaiser and his wife. When the fort is retaken, the French and English prisoners celebrate by singing 'La Marseillaise'. The news comes in the midst of a musical revue put on by the prisoners; the show is interrupted and stage occupied to perform a bombastic rendition of the French anthem. The rousing music seems to compel the camera to move, as in the previously discussed sequence, circling around the singers as if to cordon off the space from the humiliated German officers (who swiftly get up and leave). In both sequences, the masculine bravado of the music commands an assertion of space and superiority. Yet the affinities in the presentation of each sequence demonstrate the mutuality of their nationalistic concerns: German guards and French prisoners are not so dissimilar after all.

Such an insight is also given voice by means of music. The two scenes discussed above are bridged by the main body of the musical revue, in which Cartier gives a radiant performance of a vaudeville number entitled 'Marjorie'. Despite the spatial partition of guards and prisoners in the auditorium, the exuberant performance temporarily unites them into a single appreciative audience. Following directly from the scene of German celebrations, the sense of inclusiveness generated by Cartier's routine (he gestures to both prisoners and guards throughout the song) is set in notable contrast to its musical predecessor. Yet the speedy transition from the end of the German song to the start of 'Marjorie' makes apparent the fact that they share the same tonal centre and are rendered in the same key. This detail yields the subtle sense that, despite their differences in appropriation, the two songs share a common register.

The opening juxtaposition of French and German barracks similarly uses music to trace comparisons and contrasts. The central presence of a gramophone and the playing of recorded music is common to both spaces, yet the contrast between the musical genres favoured in each location—a contemporary French popular song as opposed to an old-fashioned Austrian-style waltz—points to divergent attitudes and to significant differences in class and national identity. In the film's opening scene, the light tone of 'Frou Frou', with its single bell chiming a rhythmic echo to the cheerful vocals, contrasts with the vigour of the credits theme to

conjure up an atmosphere of civilian merriment rather than military duty. The camera pans upwards from a revolving record to a uniformed soldier, Maréchal, who bears over the gramophone and inexpertly sings along to the tune. The song remains prominent on the soundtrack, and the trumpet-shaped speaker prominent in the frame, as Maréchal organises a lift into town to see his girlfriend. Thus associated with his provisional liberty, it is apt that when Maréchal is shortly summoned to a military briefing that will determine his fate, the music is halted abruptly (presumably by his own hand in order that he can hear the command). In addition, the briefing room happens to be next door to the officer's mess, so that when the gramophone is restarted by another soldier the muffled strains of 'Frou Frou' seep through the walls, taunting Maréchal with cruel reminders of civilian freedom.

In the film's second sequence, set in the German barracks after Commandant von Rauffenstein has shot down a French aircraft, the use of music is much more ceremonial. The Commandant's gruff demand for "*Musik!*"—to commemorate his military victory and toast his own hospitality in inviting the survivors to lunch—is met by a rather stately classical waltz. Unlike the French soldier, the German Commandant starts the music indirectly—with an order—so that the music is associated more with his military bearing than with his individual agency. On the other hand, the instrumentation of the waltz (melodic strings and a plucked harp) is far from military in character. The music invokes a courtly world of dinners and dances, far removed from this modest military outpost. Thus both songs, despite their differences, recall experiences outside of the immediate anxieties of war; both songs function as escapism. But whilst 'Frou Frou' emphasises the incompatibility of civilian pleasures and military duty, Rauffenstein's waltz, nostalgic for the unthreatened decorum of the past, seeks to impose a continuity between the chivalric rules of leisure and of war.

Having destroyed their plane, the only proper thing for Rauffenstein to do is to invite the surviving officers to lunch. As the guests sit down to eat at his table, another waltz begins on the gramophone to accompany the meal (the fact that no order is heard for this music to begin suggests Rauffenstein's genial luncheon has been preplanned with military rigour). Beginning with a dreamy woodwind descent into the melody, complementing the movements of the characters as they take their seats, the affable tone of this ballroom waltz embodies Rauffenstein's obstinate attitude that civility should prevail in war, that stiff salutes are no substitute for firm handshakes. Against the backdrop of this music, bonds of polite acquaintance are quickly forged across national lines but strictly within social ranks. Rauffenstein and Boieldieu find their aristocratic backgrounds reason enough for mutual esteem, framed in the discrete unit of a two-shot, while the patrician music serves to naturalise their bilingual discussion of education and riding. Similarly, Maréchal and his German neighbour locate common ground in terms of their pre-war working-class professions, with the genteel music lending an aspect of utopian feeling to the German soldier's gesture of cutting meat for the wounded Frenchman. As Maréchal and the German officer exchange pleasantries, the camera slowly circles them, at pace with the music, until Maréchal's gaze becomes focussed on something offscreen. The conversation halts; for a moment, the serious expressions and fixed eyes of the soldiers contrast with the breezy tone of the continuing waltz. The men stand briskly, solemnly. Finally we see the object of their gaze, and the sharp cut is matched by the abrupt silencing of the music, mid-phrase: a soldier struggles to carry a giant funeral wreath for the fatalities of the French air crash. Because the music has been sourced within the



La Grande Illusion: the rehearsal

room, its sudden cessation is understood as a token gesture of respect, both for the dead, and for the French soldiers present. However, the crassness of this performance of tact is underlined by the violence of the music's termination, breaking the flow of its waltz rhythm. The result is to emasculate for us Rauffenstein's fantasy that war can be a civil affair.

In both sequences, the sudden halting of music registers the war's brutal disruption of lives. This is poignantly so because the music's silencing is brought about by a pressure within the film's world that is itself a consequence of the war. In both cases, the silencing takes place offscreen, much like the horrors of battle which remain, in this film, unseen but importantly alluded to (the downing of the French plane; Rauffenstein's neckbrace; Elsa's absent husband). The sense of diversion and momentary escape afforded by music in these opening scenes provides an understanding, later in the film, for the tireless efforts of the prisoners in putting on their musical show. The theatrical preparations serve in part as a distraction from their deeper purpose of scheming to escape from the camp (for one thing, the rehearsals give an excuse for them to be together in one place without much supervision). Yet it is suggested on several occasions that the time invested in rehearsals actually slows the progress of the tunnel. The reminders of pre-war vaudeville embodied by the musical numbers seem to be an escape in themselves. Similarly, while the synchronized playing of tin-whistles by the prisoners functions to assist the eventu-

al breakout of Maréchal and Rosenthal, the exuberant bedlam of this musical mutiny in effect provides a momentary freedom for *all* prisoners from the numbing routines of the camp. In particular, Boieldieu's virtuoso tin-whistle performance on the ramparts, contradicting the modesty of his earlier claim of having "no talent for theatricals", is more than a noisy distraction for the escape of his fellow prisoners. Playing the multiple roles of cavorting satyr, fearless rebel and melodramatic martyr, Boieldieu's gentle, pensive, enigmatic rendition of a French folksong, floating over the battlements, is at once a hymn for the end of war, a lament for the end of aristocracy and an ode to the values of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. The shooting of Boieldieu on the ramparts is another powerful silencing of music.

The same folksong recurs, in a rather different form, during the squabble between the fleeing fugitives. The frustrations and anxieties of their gruelling mountain trek towards the refuge of Switzerland cause the pair to lose patience with one another, and become manifested in a conflict in which social distinctions come to the fore ("I never liked Jews anyway", says Maréchal). As Maréchal storms off, leaving the injured Rosenthal to the mercy of the elements, Rosenthal yells a rendition of this folksong in defiant demonstration of his indifference to Maréchal's leave-taking, and perhaps as a claim to French nationality in retort to Maréchal's brief burst of anti-Semitism. In response, Maréchal barks back the same song as he forcefully strides away, a display

that he is better off without Rosenthal and his foot-rot. Slowly, however, his belligerent yelling softens into tones of sorrow. Humbled, he reappears at Rosenthal's side, and offers him a hand. The poignancy of this moment, for the characters and for us, is achieved through the multiple connotations of the music, and the fact that they sing the *same* song. The performance of indifference on either side cannot be sustained by the very song that bought them freedom with the sacrifice of their friend. In spite of their assertions of self-sufficiency, the resonance of the song brings to light their obligation as human beings to struggle on together.

Maréchal has already encountered the power of music to heal and inspire during his gruelling stretch in solitary confinement. There, too, an outburst of anger is miraculously met by a gesture of compassion. Maréchal's resentful outburst in his cell is calmed by a German guard who sits beside him on his bunk. Frustrated by his seclusion and tired of shouting, Maréchal cries: "I want to hear a friendly voice... I want to hear French spoken". Speaking only German, the guard nevertheless seems to understand the sentiment, placing a simple mouth organ on the bunk beside the prisoner. As the sentry exits the cell, Maréchal hesitantly puts it to his

La Règle du Jeu: Octave, the failed conductor.



lips and gently plays. The film cuts from inside the cell to the chamber outside, where the guard listens, recognises, nods and begins to cheerfully sing along, wordlessly, as he returns to his duties. The gesture of giving the harmonica is an acknowledgement of human need that exceeds the designated roles of prisoner and guard. Similarly, the playing of the harmonica overcomes the language barriers that demarcate national identity, implying music to be something of a 'universal' language. Moreover, with the cut from cell to outer chamber, the soft sound of the harmonica is shown to traverse the steel door that separates French captive from

German sentry. By highlighting the literal capacity of sound, unlike visual phenomena, to pass through solid barriers, the use of editing and sound here suggests the potential of music to transcend boundaries and reach towards a common humanity. A related notion is articulated in the scene in which the French prisoners, discussing their very different backgrounds, hear a German-played military fife arising from the training yard outside. "You must admit it's stirring", says one. As they gather by the window to listen, spellbound by the music, the camera pulls back, keeping the prisoners centre-frame, right through the open window and hovers, as it were, in the air outside. Contrary to its design, the fife reaches across factional lines, grouping the prisoners together despite their differences, extending outwards to encompass both sides of the divide.

The irony that the fife acts to pull together and boost the spirits of those whom it is designed to intimidate is an irony that finds something like an inverted rhyme in *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du Jeu*, 1939). The musical celebrations of the Fête de la Colinière are intended by the Marquis to unite the group, allowing them to put aside their differences. Yet the very music churning from the auditorium, finding its way into every corner of the château, ironically underscores the fierce disintegration of this community as it fractures throughout the house. All of the diegetic music in *The Rules of the Game* is importantly related to the Marquis since it emanates from his domain (his party, his hunt, his mechanical toys). Yet the most consistent effect of this music is to register the Marquis' failure to keep that domain in check amid an escalating chaos that culminates in the death of André Jurieu. Notably, the only time when non-diegetic music is used is at the very end of the film when the Marquis attempts to tie up loose ends with his explanation of this 'accident'. Earnest, sad and dignified, the Monsigny piece heard here more closely correlates to the intended effect of the Marquis' performance than to any endorsement of his mollifying words. So affiliated with his efforts to appease and conclude, the music's nondiegetic status works to suggest that the Marquis' resolution, rather than having been generated organically by the internal workings of the group, has cosily drawn upon external elements—the licence of an aristocratic past, the authority of an author—to stage a false sense of closure.

The intended climax of the festivities is the 'Danse Macabre', in which a mechanical piano playing a version of Saint-Saëns' famous theme accompanies some dancing skeletons on stage. The performance initially seems to unify the guests in a kind of stunned stillness; but just as the skeletons spill from the stage into the auditorium, the guests soon spill out from the ballroom and disperse throughout the hallways and antechambers of the château, a movement echoed by the music's coincident dissolution from two distinguishable themes into a torrent of chromatic runs. The shift from choreography to chaos is also registered in the relations between image and sound. Action within the ballroom in the first half of the sequence is arranged to match the contours of the music: both on-stage, where skeletons swing back and forth to complement the waltz's rhythmic intonation; and, to some extent, in the auditorium, where each time the roving camera picks out and briefly rests on different sets of characters along the side-aisle, their appearance within the frame is punctuated by a new musical idea. This pattern of correlation culminates when, upon the break of a crescendo, Schumacher the gamekeeper lunges for Marceau the poacher; at which point the action becomes so hectic that no tidy choreography can accommodate it.

As the characters rove across the chequered floor in pursuit of their private destinies, the music continues to churn out from the



main hall. Whilst the Marquis hopelessly tries to attain some semblance of order in his house, the use of music lightly mocks his ineffectual attempts at intervention by repeatedly correlating his physical movements to the comic polka issuing from the ballroom. Resolutely deciding to “go and talk to Christine” after failing to help Octave out of his bear costume, the Marquis slams the chamber door behind himself in a bold reassertion of his territory. But the gesture is comically matched by the downbeat at the end of the polka’s opening phrase, making his actions seem less than magisterial. Moreover, he is immediately diverted from his task by his servant Marceau, who grabs him from the side-aisle precisely as the polka’s second phrase begins. A third correlation occurs when the Marquis gives Marceau a playful yet weary punch on the arm, an acknowledgement of his failure with women that coincides with the tune’s completion as if sealing his deficiency as a leader. Finally, as he strides forward with every intention of acting decisively, the sharp snap of his fingers—to signal the ‘all-clear’ to Marceau and thereby become partisan in a dispute he should ideally rise above—coincides exactly with the beginning of the next song and seems to animate the camera to move (sideways, in accord with the Marquis’ stride). This coordination between gesture, music and camera movement evokes something of the Marquis’ belief in his own powers of orchestration, but in fact the sequence as a whole proves such powers to be illusory. The piano music ‘initiated’ by the Marquis’ finger-snap continues unbroken for several minutes over events that transpire well outside his sphere of influence. The sedate tune continues unbendingly as a roaming camera offers various glimpses of the escalating disorder: Schumacher hunts down Marceau for making passes at his wife, the Marquis becomes sidetracked once again and returns to the salon to present his new mechanical toy, whilst André stumbles into a discovery of St Aubin making advances on Christine. As it reaches completion the tune is eventually drowned out by the exchange of insults and slaps between André and St Aubin as they squabble over the Marquis’ wife.

Having previously been ‘tied’ to the Marquis’ physical movements, the presence of salon music over this squabble—particularly with the recurrence of the polka tune as the men begin to brawl—lays emphasis on the Marquis’ absence from events. In fact, the use of music here actively works to deny any sense of neatness or a regulating influence in the way gestures and actions are set at odds with the sovereign tones and rhythms of music arising independently from the ballroom. Rather than taking on the sense of appropriateness usually wished for in dramatic scoring, the apparent indifference of the music to the turmoil it underscores is a central part of its effect. As the men brawl in the parlour and on the stairs, the polka can be heard to mock their claims to masculine chivalry and point up the pathetic, rather than heroic, dimension of their squabble. On account of its perceived source, the music affirms the theatricality of their fight and gives it the tone of a farce. Yet this tone does not have the feeling of ‘authorial commentary’ because the choice of music is credible, the volume is plausibly muted to mark its distance from the stage and the squabble is not at all choreographed to match the pace and cadence of the music. Indeed, the relative autonomy of the music from the accompanying visuals (in combination with its muted volume) serves to remind us of the simultaneity of two separate fields of action, and so point, for one thing, to the Marquis’ neglect of his wife.

A similarly loose fit between music and image can be found in the kitchen sequence in which Chopin’s ‘Minute Waltz’ accompanies the chit-chat of the servants. This looseness of fit—achieved in the lack of direct correlation between music and movement and in

contrasting the associations of a sophisticated waltz with the bustle of a working kitchen—is made more apparent since the music is not physically sourced until the scene’s final cutaway to the kitchen radio. As a result, the music occupies, for the duration of the scene, an odd space between seeming diegetic and non-diegetic in character. The waltz’s ‘arbitrary’ commencement, right in the middle of the chef’s tirade about the best way to make a potato salad, can thus be heard both to mock his snooty pretensions to refinement and to signal the relative disorder of a realm where there is not theatrical silence for a pompous pronouncement (unlike the realm upstairs). Indeed, the intricate flurry of the melody, with its countless runs zipping up and down the scale, broadly parallels the activity of servants’ leaving, entering, upping and sitting: the music’s complexity works to heighten the hectic atmosphere of the kitchen rather than play it down. Tensions boil, flirtations commence, hierarchies are upset, and the music skips gaily onwards.

With the scene’s final shot of the kitchen radio, the delayed disclosure of a diegetic source for the ‘Minute Waltz’ is not so much a revelation as a confirmation of the servants’ mirroring of their masters’ attitudes and behaviour. The sense of upstairs/downstairs mirroring is extended in the dissolve from one machine to another, from the kitchen radio to a clock on the landing, ping-pong out its chime to announce bedtime for the bourgeoisie. The regular chimes are swiftly joined on the soundtrack by the Marquis’ efforts to organise the group, unsuccessfully trying to shepherd his guests to bed for an early night before the next day’s shoot. This collusion between diegetic sound and an attempt to order, quite at odds with the use of music in the kitchen sequence, characterises succinctly the Marquis’ mode of government, in which a superficially laissez-faire approach disguises a wish for mechanised orderliness. Such an approach is exemplified by his mania for clockwork musical toys. Whilst the simple, predictable behaviour of his little mechanical dolls is set in contrast to the inscrutable, volatile human beings that populate the château, the metallic tones that emanate from these contraptions give voice to the Marquis’ desire for things to run like clockwork. Like the servants who scuttle around unacknowledged, or the Marquis’ stipulation for “no fences” around his grounds, or those unspoken tenets that invisibly prescribe the bounds of social behaviour, the manner of control favoured by the Marquis is one in which the mechanisms of that control are concealed. If Renoir is predisposed to acknowledge the source of music and the complex origins of social action, the Marquis is at pains to mask them.

This relationship between the Marquis’ use of music and the tacit ‘rules of the game’ is first suggested in the scene in which Christine visits her husband in his room after André’s shameless broadcast of their former intimacy. The tension between the pair is deflected by attention to the Marquis’ new musical doll, the bright tinny tune of which provides relief from the radio’s troubling cacophony. His winding of the device allows a justifiable avoidance of eye contact with Christine as he ‘turns a blind eye’ to her affair; meanwhile the childlike melody issuing from the doll as he excuses her behaviour, dismissing André’s amorousness as “naïve”, aids him in his own performance of naivety. Here the tacit rule of marital discretion is obeyed with mechanical fidelity. As a response to the burden of complexity, the Marquis turns to the comfort of his musical toys. Rather than face problems directly, his mechanical contrivances provide him with a reassuring model of how, in an ideal world, things should work. Most notably, as tensions escalate in the house during the Fête de la Colinière, the Marquis forsakes his responsibility to put a stop to the mayhem, instead choosing to exhibit his newly-acquired bar-



rel organ to the remaining audience. But his enthusiastic presentation of his toy pulls only a thin veil over the anarchic muddle going on elsewhere. The frenzied music blaring from the pipes seems less of a distraction from the rowdy antics of the house than a manifestation of them. The Marquis' gesture of putting a handkerchief to his mouth as he stands on stage beside the machine suggests the tension between his public and private face: the music that issues from the organ at once assists his show of self-assurance and provides a stressful reminder of the turmoil that is beginning to overwhelm the house. It contains a fleeting recognition of the inappropriateness of his response. Indeed, the utter incompatibility between mechanical ditty and the convolutions of a society in turmoil is affirmed in a later moment when the clamour of the barrel organ scores the frantic chase around the ballroom: as Schumacher, in deadly pursuit of Marceau, aims his pistol at the bemused crowd, the blaring music is suddenly arrested, sent crashing into a mechanical seizure. The implication is that the Marquis' style of order is incapable of responding to the drastic fluctuations of social unrest.

George Wilson argues that the narration of *The Rules of the Game* "represents a continued and intermittently frustrated attempt to keep under surveillance a complex of interlocking activities, which progressively become too irrepressible and impenetrable to be kept effectively in sight".⁴ This impression is supported by the use of music which, in its turn away from choreography and conventional 'appropriateness' of tone, and in this latter moment of utter breakdown, can be understood to acknowledge the impossibility of 'surveying', by means of musical scoring, such a complex of interlocking activities. Indistinct motives, simultaneity of events and ambiguous gestures all typify and play their part in a style that declines to arrange the story with a god-like omniscience. The same impulse, no doubt, counsels the film's sustained use of *diegetic* music. A musical voice sourced from outside the film's world accompanying the scuffles and squabbles of the party might have implicitly suggested an organising principle at work, a sense of overarching order to the chaos that would have undermined Renoir's refusal of singular causes or simple explanations. Instead, the film's use of *diegetic* music heightens the sense of a complex, multilayered sphere of action and avoids the feeling that an all-seeing, judgemental narrator is performing an explanatory musical commentary.

In place of such a commentary, the use of *diegetic* music in each of the three films discussed here enables a complexity of viewpoint and fluidity of tone and meaning. Such features are exemplified by the scene following on from the brawl on the landing between André and St Aubin. Having pointed up the absurdity of this ungainly scuffle, thereby offering a perspective removed from any of the main characters, the polka tune continues as André, having won the fight for the woman he loves, pushes Christine into the parlour room and slams the door behind him. Inside the parlour, impetuously, Christine tells André that she loves him. Her avowal of love is depicted in a relatively empty medium-long shot, her voice is quite strained and her posture awkwardly girlish. We have the impression of an injudicious disclosure of unresolved feelings, yet we can appreciate how she might have got carried away by the thrill of the fight and the momentum of the music. André stands against the closed door, overwhelmed by relief and happiness as the polka plays on, softened behind the door that seals the couple in this room, here, now, together. The muting effect is slight but significant. It acts as a reminder of the outside world but establishes the parlour as a haven from it. It turns a taunting tune into a softly-voiced melody,

uncomplicated, easy, and light as air. It allows us to enter into the spirit of the moment, into André's blissful happiness and Christine's desire to get swept away.

Importantly, the music here is not just an expression of feeling but works upon the characters as it works upon us (although not necessarily in the same way). This creates a particular sense of emotional affinity with characters who in other ways remain distant from us. In this way and others, the use of music contributes to a perspective, by no means uncharacteristic of Renoir's style, that seems both detached and involved, critical and empathetic. As with the genial luncheon waltz in *Grand Illusion* and the opening flute in *Boudu*, the use of music allows insight into the flaws and delusions of characters, even as we appreciate and share something of their subjective position. This creative tension in viewpoint is allowed for by the fact that *diegetic* music can perform the role of 'external' commentary but is also understood to circulate within the portrayed environment: initiated and discontinued, used, played and administered, passively heard and actively listened to. The role of music within Renoir's style has been seriously overlooked in critical literature on his films. Yet the complexity, sophistication and fluidity of Renoir's style draws crucially on a use of music that emerges from within the world of the film and illuminates that world from within.

Alex Clayton is currently a final-year PhD student at the University of Kent, working on a thesis entitled 'The Body in Hollywood Slapstick'. He will be delivering papers at various conferences this year on the films of Buster Keaton.

Many thanks to Andrew Klevan, Victor Perkins, David Turner, Ralph Mackenzie and Sarah Moore for their comments, suggestions, help and support.

Notes

1 André Bazin, in his unfinished book on Renoir, praises "the suppleness, the mobility, the vital richness of form in his direction", describes *The Rules of the Game* as "a farandole danced to a frenetic rhythm in the corridors of a château" and elsewhere compares the film to a "symphony", writing of its "tonality and melody". André Bazin, *Jean Renoir* (Da Capo Press, 1992), pp 90-91/p 109/p 83. Robin Wood writes of the "fluidity of Renoir's style" in relation to Mozart: "During a famous rehearsal of the 'Linz' symphony (preserved in a recording), Bruno Walter tells the orchestra, 'The expression changes in every bar'. Of Renoir one might say similarly that (especially in *Rules*) the expression changes not only from shot to shot but frequently within the shot." Robin Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (Columbia University Press, 1998), p 69/pp 63-64.

2 As a number of theorists have noted, film music often seems to fall between categories of 'diegetic' and 'non-diegetic'. This is particularly true of the use of music in Renoir's films. Some calls have been made to change terminology (e.g. Michel Chion uses the terms 'screen music' and 'pit music', which correspond roughly to *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* [*Audio-Vision: Sound On Screen*, Columbia University Press 1994, p 80], whilst Anahid Kassabian advocates 'source music' and 'dramatic scoring', along with a third term, 'source scoring', to indicate music that takes on qualities of both [*Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*, Routledge 2001, pp 42-49]). I find switching terms less important than remaining alert to the character and effect of film music, including the effect achieved when the source of that music is disclosed or withheld, precisely or indeterminately located, and so on. I therefore tend to stick to 'diegetic' / 'non-diegetic' as conventional markers when music can be sensibly understood as such, and to signal whether or not (and how strongly, and at what point) music is 'sourced' within the space and time of the action.

3 As Stanley Cavell brilliantly writes of *Grand Illusion*: "The movie is about borders, about the lines of life and death between German and Frenchman, between rich and poor, between rich man and aristocrat, between officer and soldier, between home and absence, between Gentile and Jew. Specifically, it is about the illusion of borders, the illusion that they are real and the grand illusion that they are not." Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Enlarged Edition* (Harvard University Press, 1979), pp143-144

4 George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p 91.

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